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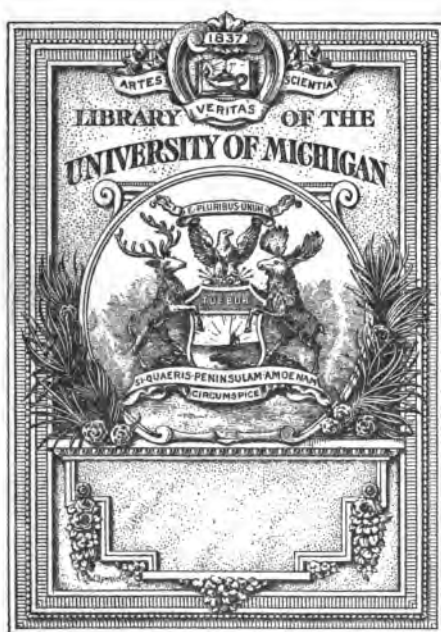
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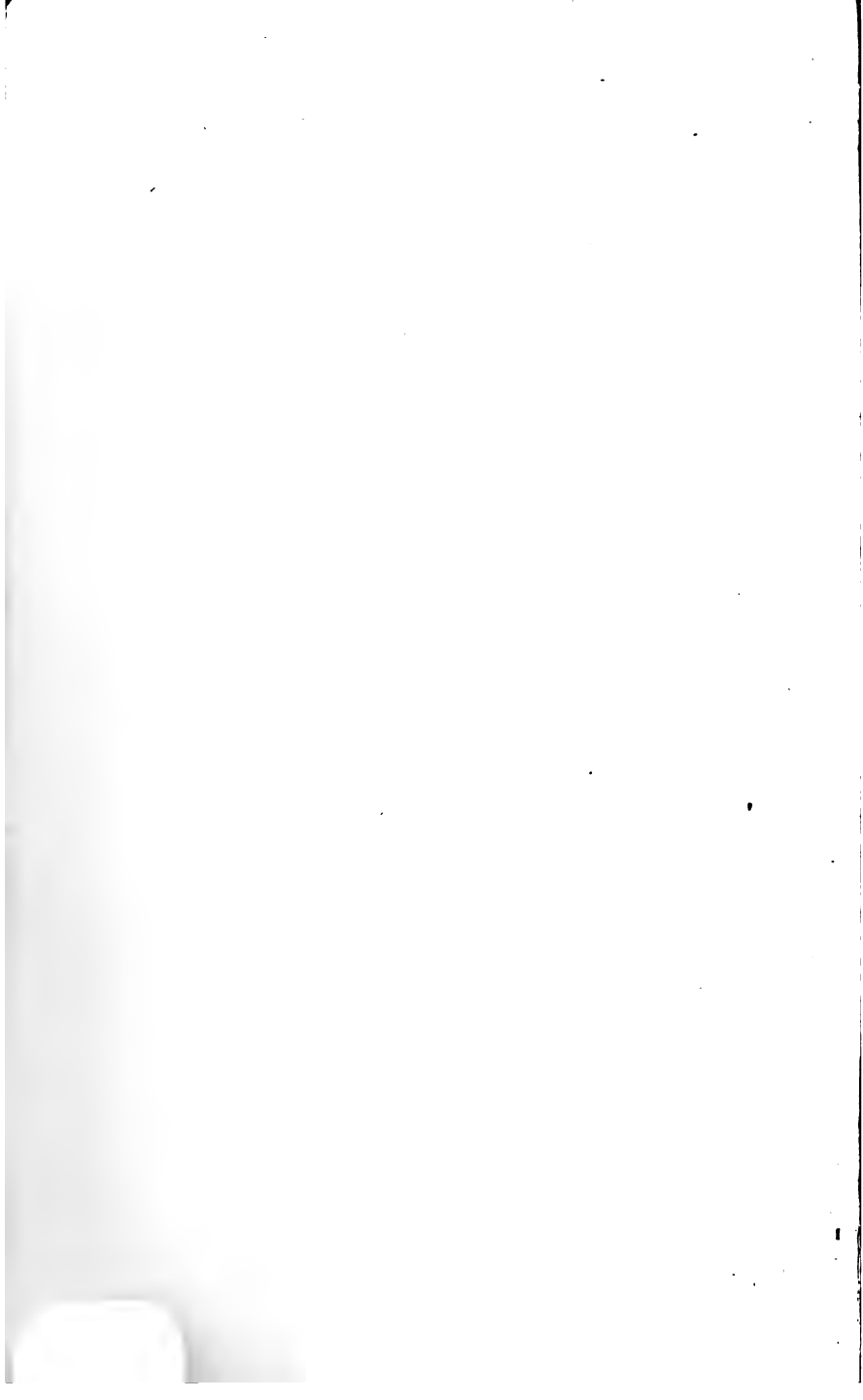
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ESSAYS IN MODERNITY





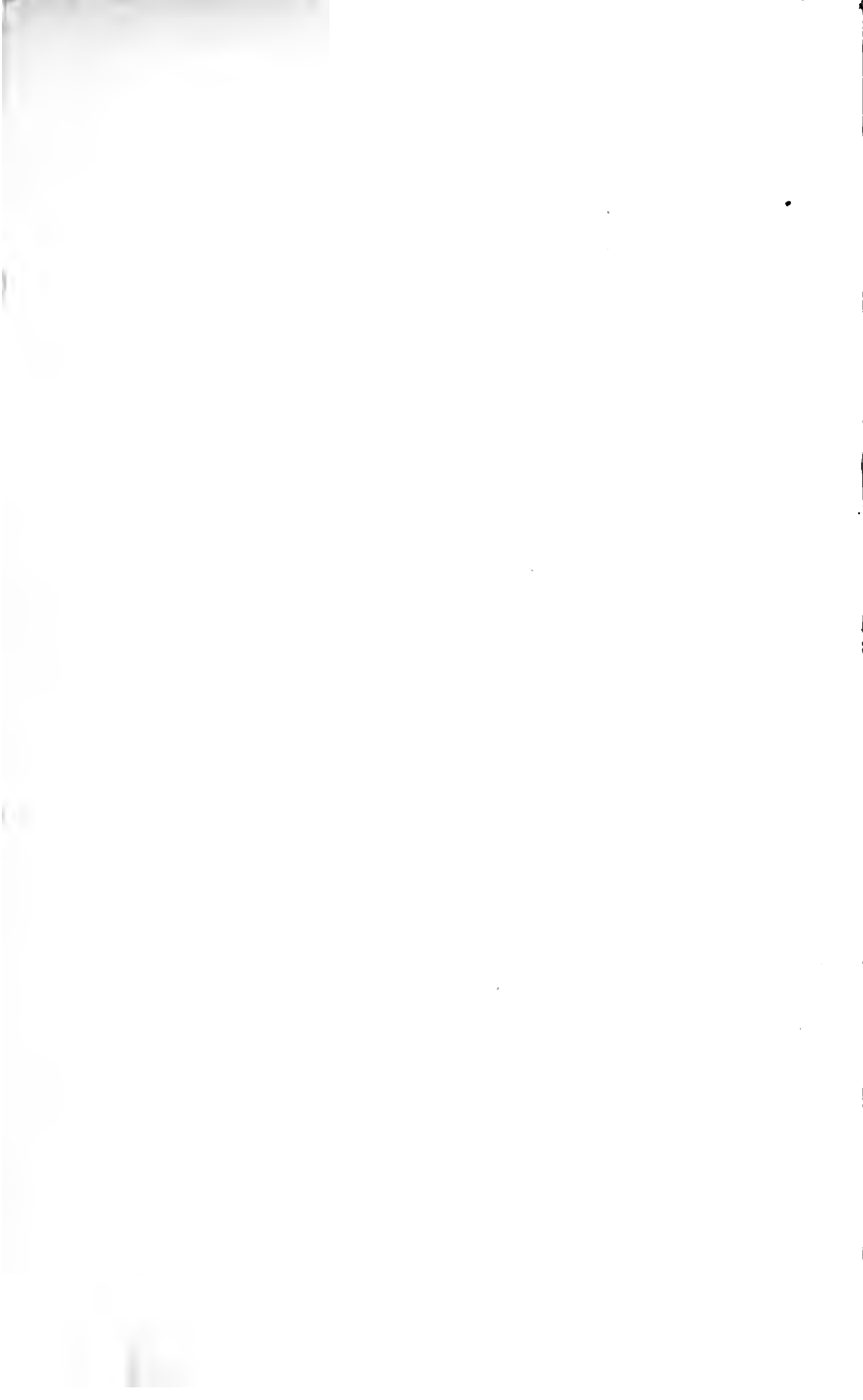
# ESSAYS IN MODERNITY

CRITICISMS AND  
DIALOGUES BY  
FRANCIS ADAMS



*"Im ganzen, guten, schönen."*—GOETHE.

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TENNYSON





# ESSAYS IN MODERNITY

## TENNYSON

THIS attempt to treat a contemporary writer with absolute critical candour will not, it is hoped, be misunderstood. The case is a special one. To the younger generation of us, the position of Tennyson in the realm of English poetry seemed from the first to differ little, if at all, so far as its actuality went, from that of Wordsworth and Coleridge, of Byron and Shelley and Keats. He presented himself to our youthful imagination as an accomplished fact. The only difference lay in a comparative ignorance of his private life, an ignorance which was by no means ambiguous enough to prove a stumbling-block. It is not too much to say that it has cost many of us far more trouble to arrive at anything like an impartial judgment of Shelley than of Tennyson. Shelley was as much a superstition to us as Byron was to our fathers. They both have the passionately personal element in them, and



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nothing obscures the calm and clear view like that. In the other case this element scarcely existed. There is only one standard by which we can attempt to judge any serious writer, and that is by the highest and best which we know of. The judgment we may hold of Lord Tennyson now may be hopelessly irreconcilable with that which we held once, if judgment it could be called, and not the blind acceptance of the enthusiasm of the generation that immediately preceded us. But so is our judgment of Wordsworth and Coleridge, of Byron and Shelley and Keats. Them also we accepted blindly as such or such or such, and it was not until we had turned back upon those guides and companions of our spiritual pilgrimage, after their power of leadership had been tested by the agony of the first hard stages, that we realised how they were to appear to us for the large remainder of the way. That same realisation came at that same period with regard also to others beside the older ones. The names of these others are the foremost names of our time, and we instinctively recognise the fact that all of them, those who went before and those who followed after, form but one company. They do. They form the company of the Age of Transition. They close the epoch. They pass the lamp of life to the New Race. They pause on the threshold of the New

World. Fifty years hence this will be plain to all. To-day it is hidden from many, and from none more perhaps than from the victorious children of Yesterday, to whom we owe all the hope and the trust of To-morrow.

Why, however, should we any longer hesitate to attempt the treatment of the later brood with the same fearless curiosity as the earlier? The parentage is the same: the habitat the same. Both have fought the good fight and won, each in their special manner. The hour has come in which the keen desire to know and express the truth about them all must be satisfied. They interest, they concern us too deeply for us to palter any longer with half views of them. We shall best show our admiration and reverence for what they have done by resolutely striving to see them—not as our fathers saw them—not as they saw or see themselves—but as they really were and are.

## I

We too often speak of the poetical movement of the opening of the century as if we did not realise that it consisted of two phases remarkably distinct from one another. The principal writers of the first of these phases survived their successors, and thus helped to confuse the significance of the movement

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in every way. Its beginning and its ending, its causes and its effects, still largely escape us. Four years saw the premature extinction of the three young leaders. Keats died in 1820; Shelley in '22; Byron in '24. Coleridge and Scott did not follow till '30 and '32, and Wordsworth dragged on up to 1850. But we must not forget that all Wordsworth's best work was done before his fortieth year—say, in the decade of 1798 to 1808—and the same is even more definitely true of Coleridge. If we except the purely literary criticism of the latter, little, very little that either of them did in their later years counts in any final estimate we may form of them. The fact is that their influence was all this time mostly for evil. The one in the realms of poetry, the other in those of thought, helped only too well to produce a hopeless intellectual lethargy. The young men of intelligence pointed to Coleridge and said: 'Here is a man who admittedly has produced some exquisite poetry, is the very first of literary critics, has a supreme culture' (as culture went in those days), 'has scaled all the heights and sounded all the depths of philosophic endeavour—and he stands there with a shining face and tells you he is ready to die for—the Church of England of 1830!' Reaction of this sort was indeed to have the day in every department of the national life for twenty years to

come, and when the first stirrings of a better state began to agitate the inert mass, they came in the sole shape of popular politics. The realms of poetry and of thought remained almost entirely unaffected.

Lord Tennyson's first appearance in literature is in the astonishing capacity of the subject of a deliberate criticism by Coleridge. Nothing could show us more clearly the dearth of all excellence than that the first literary critic of his epoch (and we may even go so far as to say both of the epoch that preceded and of that which has followed him) could treat with anything approaching seriousness such a book as the *Poems, chiefly Lyrical*. 'The misfortune is,' says Coleridge, 'that he has begun to write verses without very well understanding what metre is,' and he gives him quite a nice little pedagogic lecture on the way to attain 'a sense of metre.' It had got to this. The only thing you could talk about in a new poet was his mastery or want of mastery of metre. It never occurred to Coleridge to declare that the whole performance was effeminate and factitious. Virility, alas, had passed out of his own bones too long ago for him to notify the fact that it was wanting in any one else's. Opium had helped his facile temperament to relegate reality to the pleasant distance of a dream; and what fault was it in this young man to start from the point at which he was

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himself leaving off? Thus, then, he spake, and died, while the subject of his criticism passed on to the elaboration of his life-work.

What impresses one in the poems which Lord Tennyson has since quite justly seen fit to label 'Juvenilia,' is just this, that so far as he was concerned the movement which preceded him might almost as well never have taken place. Everything that was permanent and progressive in it he rejected. Everything that was temporary and trumpery he assimilated. The sicklier side of the art of Byron, Keats, and Shelley was absolutely to his taste. The audacity and manly scorn of Byron, the high, clear, spiritual note of Keats, the restless, searching lamentation of Shelley, fell unregarded on his ears. Such gifts were either above and beyond him, or they troubled his 'lispings in love's delicious creeds,' whose girlish votaresses sit 'steeped in golden languors,' 'languors of love-deep eyes,' and he would have none of them. His one resolute instinct here is to look nothing in the face. He would make of life a pretty play. In after years he devoted ceaseless *limæ labor* to the perfection of this earlier work, but his touch bewrayeth him. It is always felicitous, but the felicity is doomed to inferiority. He has against him the inescapable difference between enamel work and painting; the exquisite artisan never can become

a sovereign artist because his ideal is on a lower level where realisation is well within reach. Care, taste, 'the graceful tact, the Christian art,' as he calls it, never yet attained to magic. You must look at things with all your eyes before you can hope to render their shapes and beings to us, and this Juvenis will never look at anything longer than will give him its superficial picturesqueness. 'The form, the form,' he says, 'alone is eloquent,' and this is what, just at present, he means by 'the form.' Presently, however, he struck higher, but not yet with a secure flight. 'The Lotus Eaters,' as we have it now, is almost a new poem, and it is praised for its lovely landscape.

'A land of streams ! Some like a downward smoke,  
*Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn*, did go.'

Do you call that 'natural magic' ? Clearly, it is nothing of the kind. It is the daintily but ever superficially picturesque—the sort of thing that satisfies the sensitive book-reader who sees this for the first time, and wants to become familiar with it. Or again : in 'A Dream of Fair Women,' where for the first time he succeeds, though only transiently, in attaining to the note of reality, take one of his best descriptions :

'Enormous elm-tree boles did stoop and lean  
Upon the dusky brushwood underneath,  
Their broad curved branches, *fledged with clearest green*,  
New from its silken sheath.'

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Fledged with clearest green? How happy, how charmingly apt! Why, a man who has just begun to be aware that there are such things as art and literature is delighted with it. He does not see the gulf that yawns between it and

‘Daffodils  
That come before the swallow dares, and take  
The winds of March with beauty.’

What, however, the ‘Lotus Eaters’ really stands for, of course, is the first successful essay of the genuine Tennysonian music. Half a hundred failures have at last enabled him to ‘beat his music out.’ Certainly, this counts. Any individual articulation in a poet counts. It is a new contribution to the sum of our literature—a fresh note, another rendering of the beauty or the force of things. But in the ‘Dream’ he does even better still. There we shall find verse like

‘I saw, wherever light illumineth,  
Beauty and anguish walking hand in hand  
The downward slope to death.’

He is beginning to look at life as it really presents itself, and to try and render it in speech fit for men to listen to.

If we turn from the merely technical aspects of his work, the same timid artificiality still meets us at all points. He juggles away everything which he

cannot transmute into the frail and gracious loveliness which feeds his senses. When he erects a Palace of Art and hangs up some paintings of the poets, Shakespeare figures under the semblance of one 'bland and mild.' Tennyson likes him bland and mild: it is so much nicer, you know, than strenuous and heart-sick, and this is his criticism of literature. Dark hours, however, will fall upon all of us, and then there begins the sombre dialogue of 'The Two Voices.' When the dark hour passes, he goes out into the fields, and, as he is feeling considerably better, he is at once aware that 'altho' no tongue can prove, every cloud that spreads above and veileth love, itself is love.' And, therefore, he 'marvels how the mind can be brought to anchor by one gloomy thought,' and this is his criticism on life. No thought, no ideas either way: merely the appeal to sensations. Round about him there is much worry and outcry on the part of what he calls 'the people.' They seemed dissatisfied with their lot. They say they are wretched, and they seem to think they ought not to be. Well—

'Two parties still divide the world,  
Of those that want and those that have, and still  
The same old sore breaks out from age to age  
With much the same result';

and this is his criticism on the social problem.



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Buonaparte was a 'madman' whose one thought in life was 'to quell the stubborn hearts of oak,' but 'we taught him lowlier moods—we—,' until 'late he learned humility perforce, like those whom Gideon school'd with briars'; and this is his criticism on history. Finally, my friends, these are troublesome days, these days of reform or Chartist agitation, but why should we doubt of the final issue? This is the land where, 'girt with friends or foes, a man may speak the thing he will' (so Byron and Shelley found it), and, thanks be to God, it is the land where nobody is influenced by thoughts or ideas; but our dear old friend, sober-suited Freedom, 'slowly broadens down from precedent o precedent,' till her base is more than pyramidal. The truth to put it shortly, is that if you are only fairly comfortably off, 'the world comes gently to those that are cast in gentle mould,' like our poet; and what can help us better towards this pleasant preliminary than writing poems which 'everybody' has to admire as quite too pretty and pathetic? 'The May Queen' stands for the first of those resolute bids for popularity which Lord Tennyson has always been careful to reiterate. There are thirty-nine verses in this well-known poem. In twenty-eight of them one of the most perfect little female prigs in all literature takes an even more unconscionable time in dying than Charles II. The

nauseating quality of some of the verse is very remarkable.

'Nay, nay, you must not weep, nor let your grief be wild,  
*You should not fret for me, mother, you have another child!*'

The whole edificatory agony is gone through, right down to the pet clergyman of the Adelphi pit.

'It seemed so hard at first, mother, to leave the blessed sun,  
And now it seems so hard to stay, and yet His will be done!  
But still I think it can't be long before I find release;  
And that good man, the clergyman, has told me words of  
peace. . . .

He taught me all the mercy, for he showed me all the sin,  
Now, tho' my lamp was lighted late, there's One will let me in:  
Nor would I now be well, mother, again if that could be;  
Now my desire is but to pass to Him that died for me.'

Which suggests the horrible suspicion that it was  
'that good man' who had made it too hard for the  
poor thing to stay.

The conclusion to be drawn from all this seems only too clear. Here we have Tennyson at work as a poet for a whole decade, and, with the exception of a few snatches of fine verse in 'The Lotus Eaters' and 'A Dream of Fair Women,' he has produced nothing of any permanent interest. It is a notable record, even for a popular poet.

## II

Matthew Arnold declared that Lord Tennyson's 'decisive appearance dated from 1842,' and we are now indeed arriving at the hour of this 'golden prime.' But that early period of timorous ease had for ever saved his tranquillity. The storm and stress which had buffeted all our true moderns, strewing the shores of the European literature of the nineteenth century with the splendid wrecks of barks that have run but one or two record-breaking voyages, would have sunk this fragile, fairy skiff at its first putting out from port. Three years of what Heine or Musset or Byron or Keats bore would have annihilated Tennyson at any period of his teens or twenties. When the intellectual side of the poetical movement which preceded him, and which, as we have seen, he had so far resisted with the completest success, actually came upon him, he had had time to attain to a considerable amount of robust Philistinism. By the time the later developments of his younger contemporaries had worked the revolution of Science, and were beginning to work that of Literature, Tennyson was safely in the harbour. He was understood to say that he had gone through all this in his time, just as Coleridge had, and was as ready to die for the supposititious Church of 'the Lord Jesus' as

the other had been for the actual Evangelical Church of England. What, then, he was now facing was in reality nothing very formidable from the intellectual and critical side. Its danger lay in its hold on his emotions. The amount of sheer thought, of powerful and fecund ideas, in both of the early phases of the movement was slight. Byron and Shelley speak through the heart and spirit, not through the brain. The social and religious creeds of Coleridge and Wordsworth scarcely count. It was no very aggressive and convincing criticism of life and nature, of Literature, and Art, and Science, which afflicted the Christianising poet of 'In Memoriam.' He admits quite ingenuously at the end that he never really quite meant it all.

'Whatever I have said or sung,  
Some bitter notes my harp would give,  
Yea, tho' there often seem'd to live  
A contradiction on the tongue,

*Yet Hope had never lost her youth ;  
She did but look thro' dimmer eyes ;  
Or Love but played with gracious lies,  
Because he felt so fixed in truth.'*

He reveals, again and again, all his childlike, commercial egotism with a perfect simplicity of primal shamelessness. 'Does Job serve God for nought?' Let science prove him not to be a little God in his own style, prove him not to have an eternal

individuality with a claim for perpetual wages' for having been an honest man—'and what matters science unto men, at least to him? He would not stay!' Oh, no; the game would not be worth the candle! He would be a fool, in such a case, not to freely 'take his pastime.' Why, the only thing that prevents him from such creditable moral courses now is the knowledge that his spiritual banking account, whether debit or credit, is an everlasting one, and has got to be worked out satisfactorily sooner or later 'to the uttermost farthing.' How could a nurse in a hospital 'bear with the sights and the loathsome smells of disease' except she had been told on unimpeachable authority that her ministrations to the patients would count just as much as if they had been to the big Banker himself? Tennyson 'wouldn't live' unless he thought that a profit and loss system like this assured us that 'our griefs were our gains.' 'If the wages of virtue,' he exclaims, 'be dust, would she have heart to endure for the life of the worm and the fly?' He has not a single idea on the subject; it is the mere primæval religious barter of the infantile savage. He knows of no justification for virtue in itself, in the happiness it affords, in the consciousness that our salvation as individuals and as a community lies demonstratively and scientifically on these lines, and on none other.

How shockingly wanting in knowledge as a thinker  
and in self-respect as a man !

Equally shocking, alas, are the intellectual contrasts  
in him. At one moment he astonishes us by his  
insight into the natural world and the laws which  
govern it, an insight exceedingly rare at the time at  
which he wrote. Long before 'the struggle for  
existence and survival of the fittest' had become a  
commonplace with all the incoherencies of popular  
acceptance, Tennyson had asked :

'Are God and Nature then at strife,  
That Nature lends such evil dreams?  
So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life. . . .

" " So careful of the type " ? But no,  
From scarped cliff and quarried stone  
She cries : " A thousand types are gone,  
I care for nothing, all shall go.

" " Thou makest thine appeal to me :  
I bring to life, I bring to death :  
The spirit does but mean the breath :  
I know no more. " ' "

Leopardi never saw things more clearly. 'For  
nature,' says the Englishman, 'is one with rapine, a  
harm no preacher can heal.' Yet the next moment,  
like Paul, he would tell us a mystery. Once upon  
a time a man was raised from the dead. His name

was Lazarus. He had been dead four days. Where was he? 'There lives no record of reply,' says the poet, 'which, telling what it was to die, had surely added praise to praise.' What brought about this regrettable *suppressio veri*? Lazarus 'revealed nothing; he told it not'—

'Or something sealed  
The lips of that Evangelist!'

Can he be serious? He provokes the smile. Does Lord Tennyson still hold to that explanation—still in December, 1892? Truly the note of insincerity and fatuity is struck so often in 'In Memoriam' that one cannot tell. To begin with, he tried to make a tenth-rate person into an ideal type that should yet remain real, and as a pedestal for this impossible figure he must needs try to give us a statement of what he took to be Christian philosophy revised and amended up to date. We have some literary remains of Arthur Hallam, and can judge of him. His friend tells us he 'had heart affluence in discursive talk from household fountains never dry'; he was the best literary critic of his time, especially of poetry; he had 'seraphic intellect and force' as a polemist; 'impassion'd logic,' and all the graces and charms of the perfected creature. His converse compelled all men, and made the weak

and wicked strong and good, etc. In a word, 'he bore without abuse the grand old name of gentleman.' Such was the phoenix who proceeded from the loins of 'the judicious Hallam'! Talk like this is stupid—*bête*. No one who has perused the literary remains of Arthur Hallam could tolerate it for a moment. It is as bad as Mill's babble about Mrs. Taylor. As for making the poem a contribution to modern thought from the supposititiously Christian standpoint, this was obviously impossible for a man who had never given himself the trouble to seriously think at all. Tennyson had no faculty that way. We have only to consider what Browning did here to see what a terribly bad use the other made of his materials, even such as they were. He 'plays with gracious lies' right through, and, when he is tired of his amusement, falls back without a misgiving on the divine instincts which he holds in common with a hundred per cent. of the blockheads of his age and clime. But what a disgusted impatience he lays in the long run upon every earnest reader who comes to him seeing the green leaves afar off, for refreshment and repose for the teased, o'erlaboured spirit! He raises conclusion after conclusion of the most disquieting sort to the 'honest doubter,' and then, without laying one of them, or even attempting to do so, repeats his *naïf* premises with an air of charming conviction.



Oh, it is all right! 'Though Faith and Form be sundered in the night of fear,' you can still hear the sentinels passing the cheery watchword. My friend, you are on the eve of a great victory. You have *felt* it; you were *born* for it (he tells you so in italics). Then, to crown this barefaced sophistication, he remarks with a bland impertinence that he 'trusts he has not wasted breath,' and that he has not 'fought in vain, like Paul, with beasts.' Fought with beasts? Why, he never was once fifty yards away from his comfortable easy-chair in his cosy study the whole time! 'In Memoriam' would be one of the most dishonest works ever written by a man of ability were it not for a dozen snatches of sweet and true affection which he had in his heart of hearts for his friend. There is little or none of the passion of love, the terrible splendour of desire and renunciation, which aches and flashes in the latter half of Shakespeare's sonnets. Tennyson tells the simple truth when he says of himself:

' Mine the love that will not tire,  
And, born of love, the vague desire  
That spurs an imitative will.'

No criticism on him can better his own in that phrase of 'the imitative will.' We have him there, the intellectual side of him, complete. But this is not

the side on which our final judgment of him in this poem rests. It is the exactly opposite side—the emotional side. And here we now enter within the golden gates of pleasure and praise.

What charming pictures he gives us of the quiet, radiant purity of his love as it takes shape in his sorrow! A dozen of these are the property of all poetry lovers, and are not needed here as ocular proof. 'Dark house whereby once more I stand' (No. vii.); 'Be near me when my light is low' (No. l.); 'When on my bed the moonlight falls' (No. lxvii.); 'Ring out, wild bells' (No. cvi.). Why should I string these pearls together out of those bushels of vacant intellectual 'chaff well meant for grain'? That will be some one else's task before thirty years are gone, or, perchance, twenty.

And this note of sincerity, the true note, the characteristic note, the vital note, he attains to now at last in another department of his work—in the department of the love-poem. Passion seizes on him. In the actual results, of course, all his faults and limitations still grievously afflict him, and the first poem of power which he wrote—'Locksley Hall'—is disfigured no less as a serious piece of social criticism by the crudest enthusiasms than morally and spiritually by the vindictive meanness of the lover gloating over his mistress as she tends her drunken master and 'perishes' in

her final 'self-contempt' as an orthodox *materfamilias*. With an amazing want of perception Lord Tennyson, half a century later, tried to paint his hero even blacker than he had already painted him, and in a sequel shows us Amy as a happy saint, and her husband as a model husband! This is very funny—far funnier than 'The Northern Cobbler,' or even our terrible young friend 'The May Queen'; but surely it was not needed. The fact remains that in 'Locksley Hall' he wrote some exceedingly fine verse, and, when he arrived at his more lucid moods, was able to compose some love-songs to a woman as perfect in their way as his love-elegiacs to his friend. Here and there 'Maud' reaches to real passion and the perfected expression of it. Her love has made his life 'a perfumed altar flame.' 'He has walked awake with Truth' for the first time in his life, and he takes us with him. And the poignant note—the tone of the agony of loss, 'deep as first love and wild with all regret'—he has won it at last. And there is more to be said. The advance he makes now is made all along the line. Compare 'Tithonus' with 'Ænone,' 'Lucretius' with 'The Palace of Art,' 'The Grandmother' and the two 'Northern Farmers' with (once more, and for the last time) that cruel 'May Queen,' 'The Sailor Boy' with 'Lady Clara Vere de Vere,' 'Flower in the Crannied Wall' with 'To J. S.' It is

all the difference between the amateur and the professional, the half-hearted dilettante and the serious worker. We have at last reached the point where we have to reckon with him, where we can no longer relegate him to girls and undergraduates, but must face him and what he has done on this line and on that, and consider the claims advanced in his behalf as a representative modern poet.

## III

Those claims (let it at once be noted) are not now what they were even ten years ago. Men not devoid of the saving grace of intelligence could then be found ready to contend for a place for Tennyson above all the poets of the century. They spoke of him as the supreme mouthpiece of his epoch in the same way as Milton was, as Shakespeare was, as Chaucer was. At this hour one is at least spared the trouble of wasting time on any such vain proposition. Even the veteran survivals of the Tennysonian cult of the seventies and early eighties would now be content to accept an admission of his superiority over his contemporaries, and of an equality with Wordsworth and Byron and Keats, with Coleridge and Shelley, with Gray and Burns. These at least are the claims that will be considered here, because they are still being

made, and in all probability will continue to be made for some time to come.<sup>1</sup>

We have seen in 'In Memoriam' some of the poet's efforts to figure as a modern in the domain of what is usually called thought. Let us have samples of his ripest criticism on other aspects. The revolution in Science worked out under the leadership of Darwin, Professor Wallace, and Mr. Herbert Spencer, of Professors Huxley and Tyndall (to give no other names), is a present fact too solidly obvious to be gainsaid. Some opinion on it is inevitable from a 'representative modern poet.' What has ours to say about it? Little enough, but that little is extremely instructive as showing how far and in what manner he has realised this fact. Sitting pensively on a rock on the seashore, the hero of 'Maud' sees a pretty sea-shell. 'What is it?' he wonders. Then he adds immediately, 'A learned man could give it a clumsy name.' And so much for learned men. A pious nurse in a hospital (none other than the lady who puts up with the sights and loathsome smells of disease in considera-

<sup>1</sup> One charitably averts one's eyes from the melancholy spectacle of the English critical press at Lord Tennyson's death. Scarcely anything uttered at that time can be taken seriously at all. The frantic competition in eulogy drove the professional writers to utter the most inconceivable absurdities in order to get a hearing and a place in this prodigious 'boom.' It would have been supremely ludicrous had it not ended with becoming supremely disgusting.

tion of a big supernal *pourboire*) knows a bold bad doctor who doubted that 'seeking the Lord Jesus in prayer' would 'set a broken knee.' He himself puts up with the sights and smells and the rest without any such exceptional future 'perquisites' as hers; but to the pious nurse he 'looks so coarse and so red' that, with her wonderful, sweet, womanly charitableness, she '*could think*' (admirable phrase!) 'he was one of those who would break their jests on the dead, or mangle the living dog that had loved him and fawn'd at his knee—drench'd with the hellish ooralis.' And so much for men who come 'fresh from the surgery-schools of France and other lands.' A woman's-rights woman, who is also a princess and a genius ('a lovely, lordly creature,' 'fair and strong and terrible,' 'a strange poet-princess with grand imaginations,' 'the flower of womanhood,' etc.), thus again disposes off-hand of this facile subject of vivisection :

'Those monstrous males that carve the living hound,  
And cram him with the fragments of the grave.'

And as this is all, absolutely all, that our poet says on these matters, it is to be presumed that this is all he has to say. In his later hour of senile celebrity he has done the thing over again with a virulent energy which is positively amazing. Those myopic stumblings of his manhood seem large and lucid beside the distressing mental collapse, the insane and incoherent

rhodomontade of so much of 'Sixty Years After.' Unhappily, the same phenomenon is to be noted in a dozen other cases. This hapless caricature of the 'man of science' has a perfect parallel in the equally hapless caricature of the Frenchman, or of the Dissenting Minister, or of any other person who lives outside the exiguous pale of Lord Tennyson's antiquated prejudices of caste and religion. The Church of England clergyman (as we have seen) is the embodiment of the mildness and sweet reasonableness of Christ: he is 'that good man.' The Dissenting Minister appears, and appears only, and again and again, as 'heated pulpiteer, not preaching simple Christ to simple men,' who does 'his oily best, dropping the too rough H in hell and heaven, to spread the Word by which himself has thriven.' And France? what has he to say of France—social, artistic, and literary? Socially, it is the home elect of 'blind hysterics,' of 'revolts, republics, revolutions, most no graver than a schoolboy's barring-out'—in a word, of a 'red fool-fury.' Artistically, it is the producer of 'poisonous honey,' which somebody or other 'stole,' and malignantly attempted to use on the supreme painters of our English Royal Academy, but (it would still seem) without any very marked result. Of French literature it is needless to say any more than that it is all 'wallowing in the troughs of Zolaism,'

and (somehow or other) manages, while doing so, to go not only 'forward, forward, ay, but backward, downward, too, into the abysm,' thus entirely beating the performance of Mr. Gladstone's *protégés*, the Gadarene pigs.

The simple truth is that stuff of this sort is beyond the bounds of patience. Tennyson's negative criticism of his age cannot be taken seriously for one moment. It is childish. We turn, therefore, to his affirmative criticism in the hope of finding there, in his efforts at direct creation, something that the mind can at least rest upon. Now, it happens that he has come to the test here in the fullest and most satisfactory manner, to wit, in his creation of King Arthur.

King Arthur is a crucial case, because he is Lord Tennyson's deliberate attempt to present to us an ideal figure of social manhood. He disclaims, of course, all historical fidelity. This is not the British Arthur of cairns and cromlechs, nor yet he 'of Geoffrey's book, nor he of Malleor's.' This is the King Arthur who is 'like a modern gentleman of stateliest port,' and as a perfected product of modernity is he to be judged. His story is the story of 'Sense at war with Soul.' He is himself 'the fair beginner of a nobler time,' the protagonist of goodness, truth and beauty for each and for all, 'the highest and the most human too.' We are led to understand that



the hero of 'In Memoriam,' 'the man' the poet 'held as half divine,' had something to do with this presentment of the '*flos regum*,' and in 'dedicating, in consecrating, with tears,' these idylls to the memory of the late lamented Prince Consort, we are told that 'he held them dear, perchance as finding there unconsciously some image of himself.' All this helps us to realise the better what Lord Tennyson means by a modern gentleman. But there can be little doubt on the subject: his conception is too clearly marked. From the very first, where Arthur is introduced as a candidate for matrimony, he portrays himself with a supreme ingenuousness. Leodogran, the King of Cameliard, had but one child, a daughter—

'And she was fairest of all flesh on earth.'

Arthur, with a touching modesty, promptly recognises his predestined bride. 'For,' says he,

'Saving I be joined  
To her that is the fairest under heaven,  
I seem as nothing in the mighty world,  
And cannot work my will, nor work my work,  
Wholly, or make myself in mine own realm  
Victor and lord.'

Accordingly, he procures the lady, assuring her that 'her doom is his,' and that 'let chance what will, he loves her to the death.' In the same heroic and unegotistic spirit, and in almost the same terms, he addresses the man who he feels is 'the mightiest of

his knights,' and, indeed, every one of them, he 'binds with so straight vows to his own self' (*sic*) that it half scares the wits out of them.

The 'old imperfect tale' of Lord Tennyson's 'Idylls' needs no analysis here. 'The war of Soul with Sense' is fought and won and lost in the most charming manner possible all through, and forms the prettiest packet (as Carlyle remarked) of 'superlative lollipops' known in our time. We are never once allowed to approach reality except with a thousand polite precautions: we never face a single fact of life, as life actually presents itself to men and women to-day, or any other day; but everything is glossed over and resolved this way or that in absolute harmony with the old familiar Tennysonian philosophy—so long, at least, as it is humanly possible to do so. Unfortunately, there comes a point in this story, this particular story, where no amount of wriggling can quite save us—except at the cost of a spiritual and artistic cowardice of which even 'the gracious tactician, the Christian artist' is afraid—from facing a fact, a positive and brutal fact. Arthur, therefore, has to face it and we have to face it with him. Guinevere, this paragon of beauty, is an adulteress, and (what is so distressing) an adulteress who is found out. Well, an interview between her and her outraged *po* use is clearly inevitable.

Arthur, too, has got to come to the test at last, and we are to see what a modern gentleman, a modern English Christian gentleman, has to say under these circumstances to his convicted and humiliated wife. Of course we all know what a modern English navy would do. He would put on his biggest pair of boots (if, peradventure, he had a choice of this sort) and kick and jump upon the abandoned woman. But it will be very different with Arthur. Let us see what happens. The wretched creature has fled to cover at a 'holy house at Almesbury.' Thither her husband presently follows her, and in a long gallery in the nunnery finds her seated alone. At his approach she falls prone from her seat, 'and grovels with her face against the floor,' covering it from him with her arms and hair. Then Arthur, who has halted, and stands contemplating her, presently begins to 'denounce judgment.' He asks her if this is indeed she, 'the child of one *he* honour'd, and who was happy,' but is now 'dead before her shame.' The word 'child' catching his attention, he proceeds to remind her that she is barren, or, if not barren, then the parent of only sword and fire. (Kick number one.) Why, it is she who has been the means of losing him 'his right arm, the mightiest of his knights,' Lancelot, with whom he has just been fighting—a pretty state

of affairs. (Kick number two.) But see what a fine nature he has : he bears her no malice for it. No one shall hurt her. 'Fear not : thou shalt be guarded till my death.' Afterwards, of course, she must not reckon on him, and he wants to remind her that he is most likely going to die very shortly in this struggle, and why should he desire it otherwise ? 'She has not made his life so sweet to him that he, the King, should greatly care to live.' The truth is that she has 'spoilt the purpose of his life.' (Kick number three.) The thing is done and cannot be undone, one would think, and there can be no possible use in going over it all again. But not so thinks Arthur. His idea is to explain it all to her carefully, very, very carefully, so that she shall realise what a supreme and perfect wretch she is, and this he does (so he says) 'even for her sake And so he starts off. Heaven forbid that we should follow him over the seventy-one lines of pitiless blank verse wherein he points his moral and adorns his tale to his own and Lord Tennyson's satisfaction. During the course of this appalling *apologia pro vita sua*, he takes occasion to yet again impress upon her the fact of the impracticability of a future for himself where, whatever he did, he 'should evermore be vexed with her,' and the broken-spirited woman now responds to this last application of his knightly

toe by 'creeping an inch nearer and laying her hands upon his feet.' Instantly he seems to perceive his opportunity for a few final inflictions which she shall be sore with for many a day. Do not think, he says, that I came here on purpose to kick you in this way : he did not come to 'urge her crime,' or 'curse' her. Why, his vast pity for her in that painfully horizontal attitude 'almost makes him die,' seeing that it causes her to lay 'her golden head, *his pride in other summers*, at his feet' in the dirt and dust. It is merely that he'd been weighing her heart with another heart (which shall be nameless)—his heart which was 'too wholly true to dream untruth in thee.' In a word, he 'forgives her as Eternal God forgives.' Then he is ready for business, and it is with a sublime unction that he proceeds to inform her that he can't kiss her (her lips are Lancelot's), can't even touch her, for her hand is flesh, and his flesh, his too too unsolid and unmeltable flesh, as he looks down on her 'polluted' flesh, cries out, 'I loathe thee!' For she must never forget, you see, that he was 'ever virgin save for her.' However, if she purifies herself, and macerates herself, and recognises sufficiently that 'he is her husband, not a smaller soul, not Lancelot nor another,' then perhaps God may allow her to shake hands with him in heaven, and (it may even be) to kiss him ; but henceforth it is all over : she

really mustn't have any illusions about *that*. He 'will never come here again, never lie by her side.' And then, while she keeps on steadily 'grovelling, Arthur blesses her, and stalks out with a face 'as an angel's,' and disappears in due course into the night.

But this is not all. This hateful scene, the most revolting exhibition of false sentiment and fiendish cruelty in all literature, has still a climax. The woman is to be plunged into the same abysm of besotted degradation as the man. She is to accept 'the judgment' he has 'denounced,' and gloat over it! She is to wail that 'he forgave her, and she could not speak,' that 'his mercy choked her'; she is to renounce her 'false voluptuous pride,' and all her love for Lancelot, and recognise in this squalid and inhuman prig 'the highest and most human,' whose love ('I must not scorn myself: he loves me still: let no one dream but that he loves me still') is to regenerate her life! 'We needs,' she declares—

'We needs must love the highest when we see it,  
Not Lancelot nor another!'

Comment seems impossible. All that one can say is that the writer who could deliberately paint such a character as Arthur—as the Arthur of this culminant Idyll of Guinevere—and present it to us

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as his ideal of modern gentleness and modern manhood, never (unfortunately for us, and most unfortunately for himself) had the remotest conception of what gentleness meant, or what manhood meant. It is to be added that nothing more essentially unmodern, more false to every notion we possess of true morality and true justice, has been written in our time, and perhaps in any time.

### IV

Into the 'sunless gulfs' of Lord Tennyson's dramaturgie it is happily not necessary to descend. No one has taken them seriously except Lord Tennyson; and every one has wondered what on earth urged him on to such desperate courses. He had not the slightest gift for characterisation. In his narrative and lyric work he had not succeeded in animating one single original figure with the unmistakable gift of individuality. His best work in this direction had been done in such pieces as 'Lucretius,' 'Ulysses,' 'The Dream of Fair Women,' where (to use Arnold's phrase) 'the subject-matter had been found for him.' The figures in his plays labour under the added disadvantage of his complete inability to write dramatic blank verse. What shall be said of stuff like this when gravely produced by a man of

reputation? (It is a soliloquy from a play that might have been written by a Christian Evidence lecturer smitten with the letch for literary 'high falutin')—

'This author, with his charm of simple style  
And close dialectic, all but proving man  
An automatic series of sensations,  
Has often numb'd me into apathy  
Against the unpleasant jolts of this rough road  
That breaks off short into the abysses—made me  
A Quietist, taking all things easily.'

The spectacle is too painful. We cannot discuss such an artistic aberration in such a man. We must 'look and pass' to the summary of the results we have laboriously arrived at elsewhere, and to the final consideration of any other aspects of the poet's work which have yet to be entertained.

Well, the simple truth is that, taken as a whole, the poetical work of Lord Tennyson contains an amount of destructible matter which, in the immemorial phrase, is quite shocking. The ship still holds together. It has stateliness, it has beauty, especially as it drifts to leeward in the sunset glow of the poet's life. But the winds and waves of time have no reverence for water-logged and rudderless barks. A wreck is imminent, and it is our business to see who and what may yet be saved of the crew and cargo. Matthew Arnold performed a duty of pious praise when he gave us, in his book of selec-



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tions from the poetry of Wordsworth, the fruits of some such labour. It showed us just how much material really went to the production of a lasting poetic name. Thirty or forty years hence the Matthew Arnold of the day will present to his public a similar volume of Tennyson, but it will be a slim one. At one fell swoop he, too, will have cut out nine-tenths of that portion of the poet's work on which perchance he most prided himself when alive. Tennyson's direct criticism on his age, on its social phase, on its religious phase, on its intellectual phase, will then appear to his critic as of just the same value as Wordsworth's now appears to us; and that is, candidly, *nil*. All the conscious efforts of 'an imitative will' to grapple with large issues will then appear as a failure, and a grievous failure only too obviously foredoomed. A hundred facts of *milieu* will have put this beyond question. Every one will realise then that incoherently melodious bluster is the appointed form of expression for a timid and sensuous nature struggling hard to be courageous and self-secure.

A dozen short but charming extracts from 'In Memoriam' will give us the human elements of a story of youthful friendship ended too soon, a vision of 'love as pure and bright as phosphor.' Another dozen from 'Maud' will show the passion of

the same soul for a woman's heart. All the foolish exaggeration, the sentimental pose, the confused mental endeavours of the one; all the 'hysterical mock-disease' of the other, the ghastly want of thought, the absurd misuse of the realities of life, will have disappeared, and the happy reader will thrill to the delicate melodies and the jewelled hues of the verse, marvels of sound and sight. Then he will understand what this man has really accomplished for the language in which he wrote—how all his endless patience wedded to his 'inmost horticultural art' strove to lift the level of our poetical achievement one plane higher, so that after him the loose and reckless syllabifications of a Byron and a Scott should seem impossible. He will know nothing of the finikin amateur, the half-hearted *dilettante* who again and again has irritated and disgusted his fathers. He will see this star, this little sparkling star, clear of all obscuring vapours, in its serene and appointed orbit.

Turning from the batch of delightful excerpts (another dozen can be found even in the 'Idylls of the King'), he will confront unbroken poems, such as 'The Lotus Eaters,' and 'A Dream of Fair Women,' happily overrating them as the first outcomes of the post-'Juvenilia' period. Thence a small gallery of lovely products will lead him to the lesser neo-Greek and neo-Roman masterpieces, and in 'The Princess'

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maybe, he will also envisage what will still for a while remain a whole. There he will find the one figure of larger mould which the poet all but succeeded in animating, a woman's; and he will muse on the parallel of Virgil's 'Dido,' dwelling on the one piece of splendid blank verse, verse as apulse with dramatic power and passion as the dying Phoenician's, which flames and shrills on Ida's lips, denouncing the male intruders on 'her female field.' Then, too, perhaps he will have some haunting sense of the contemporary and personal applicability of Joubert's criticism on Racine as 'le Virgile des ignorants'—'the Virgil of the ill-educated.'

Yet he will find passages of real stateliness :

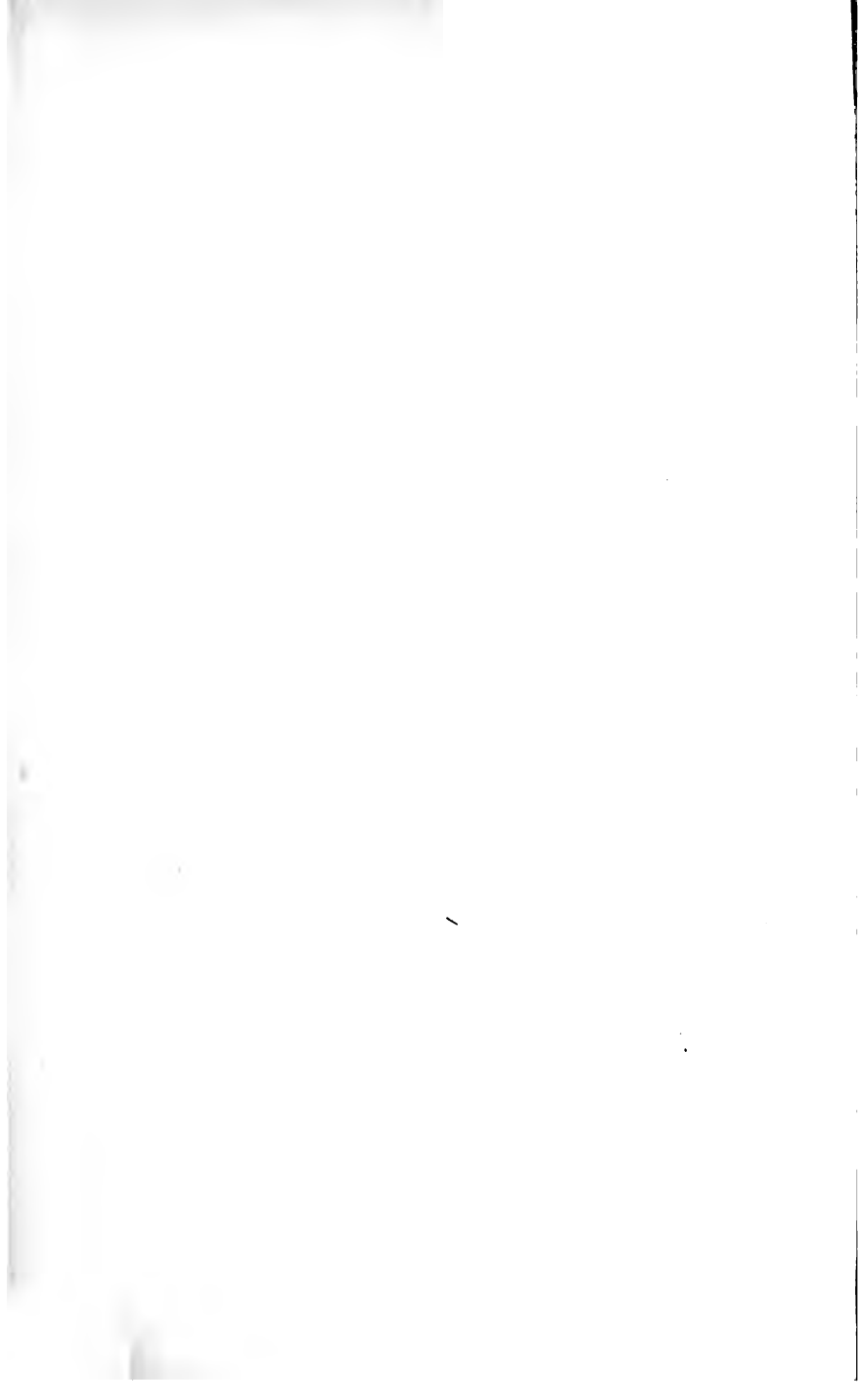
'We give you welcome—not without redound  
Of use and glory to yourselves ye come,  
The firstfruits of the stranger—after-time  
And that full voice which circles round the grave  
Will rank you nobly mingled up with me.'

Little enough of blank verse of this quality has been written in our time, and there are parts of 'The Passing of Arthur' which strike a note still higher. 'Why not a summer's as a winter's tale?' this favoured scion of the new century may ask, unaware that the decision lies not with himself, but with his still more favoured descendant, to whom the whole subject-matter of 'The Princess' may seem but the

merest temporary vanity and antique vexation of spirit. But even in the later utterances of the muse there will still be found some that are admirable for a new and more concentrated force, for a truer, a more genuine note of natural piety. No ballad in our language is more redolent than 'The Revenge' of that heroic obstinacy which has made our race the stupid conqueror of half the earth. None can deny our poet his passionate cult of England.

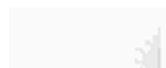
The grotesque immorality of his conscious efforts after religious edification has already afflicted us. Only when he forgets himself and all his doctrinal 'teachings' does he reach to the sincerity of true spiritual devotion. On such occasions, too unfrequent though they be, his success is unmistakable. Take as a supreme sample the poet's 'last' word'— 'Crossing the Bar'—one of the loveliest of Christian lyrics. I need not quote it. We all have it by heart. It is here that once more we find him at his truest and highest and best—here where we see him in his old age, standing with the same simplicity, the same sincerity of sorrow and trust as he stood 'in the valley of Caunteret,' or 'in the garden of Swainston,' dreaming of the three men he had loved 'with a love that ever will be'—

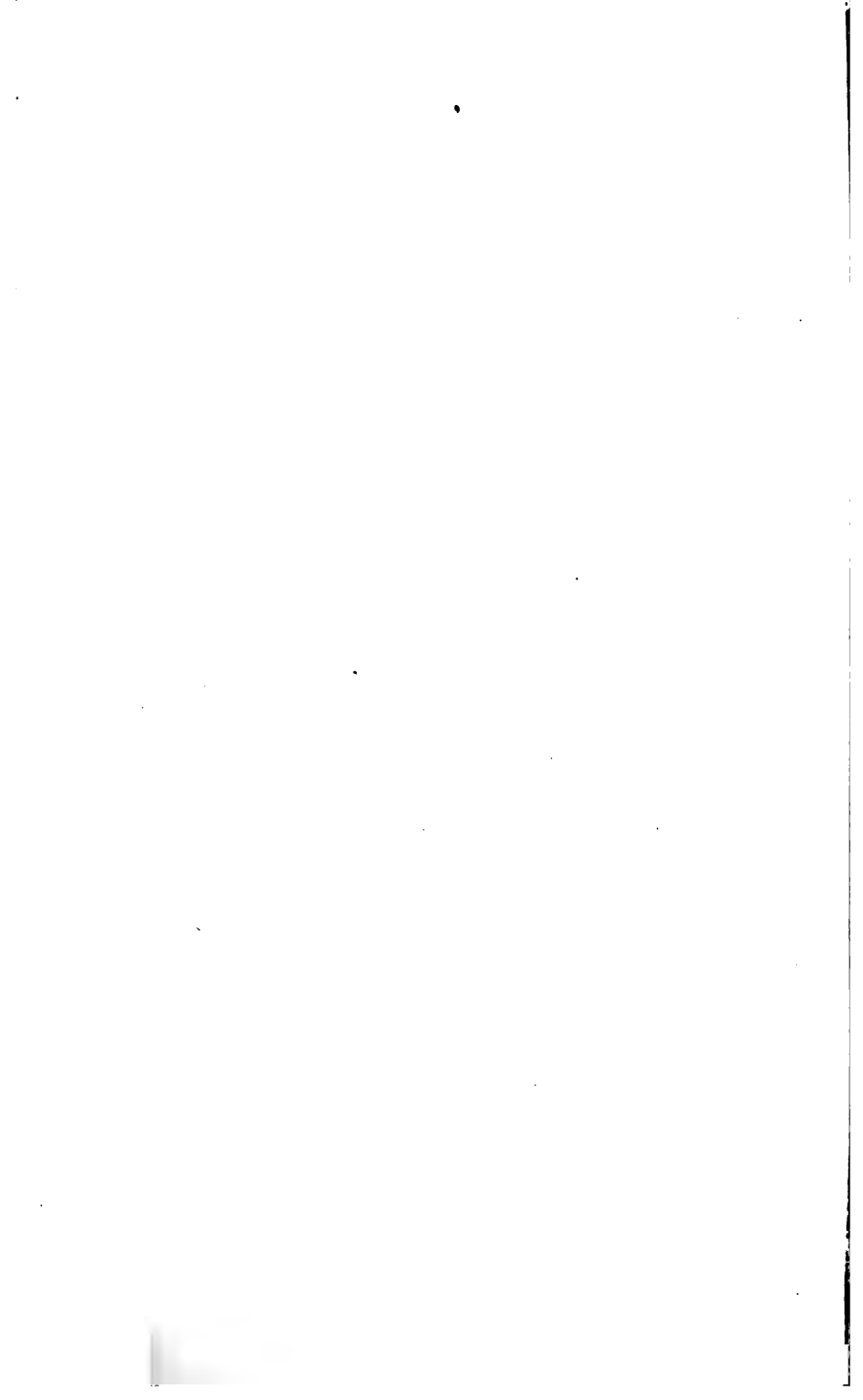
'And his voice is low as from other worlds, and his eyes  
are sweet.'



# DEMOCRACY

A DIALOGUE





## DEMOCRACY: A DIALOGUE

### I

HE sat with his friend's letter in his hand, now looking at it and realising its phrases, now losing sight of the firm, clear, 'wingèd words,' in his dreamy and tender memories of their ancient friendship.

They had not met for seven years. And in those seven years it seemed that for both of them their souls had renewed themselves as completely as their bodies. Now they stood utterly apart. Once—then—they had stood so close. He had had but two intimate personal relationships with men in all his life, and they had both exerted great influence on him. One of them had passed almost away ; the other still affected him powerfully. One was that of his old schoolfellow, Jack Daniel ; the other was that of Charlie Goulburn, a young Irish-American 'Labour leader.' He had loved them both and admired them both, though in very different ways. He was not aware



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of it, but the lines on which he at last prepared to answer Daniel's cordial and even affectionate invitation to come and visit him were laid down more or less under the direct influence of the conscience of the other friend far away.

He wrote at first slowly and with effort, tearing up more than one false start, but at last his actual feeling became clear to him, and the pen raced.

'My dear Daniel,' he said, 'your letter gave me great pleasure. It brought back the full flood-tide of the memories of our boyhood and youth together. You cannot think how vividly some of our last nocturnal walks and talks still present themselves to me. I can still *see* us and *hear* us as we wandered about on that peerless summer's night through St. John's Wood (do you remember?), and stood and watched the dawn break from the upper ground by Primrose Hill. And again, that night down at Ventnor, when we went off for our winter holiday, how the downs were covered with a thin cloak of white snow, glistening faintly in the faint light of the crescent moon and the myriad stars; and then how we tramped all along the shore of the much-resounding sea to Luccombe Chine, and came back in the glorious dawn through the Landslip.

'Ah! those were careless and delightful days, such as neither you (I expect) nor I shall ever quite regain.

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We seemed to be very close together then, and yet I can see now how far away from one another we were in reality. When we parted that pouring rainy night in Edgware Road I could have cried. You meant very much to me then—I thought, everything. Brought up as I had been, a passionate believer in my caste, proud of my ancestral name, a ruthless young Tory, with no redeeming feature but his equally passionate belief in the creed of *Noblesse oblige*, you came to me as a sort of liberator from ideas, fine enough once perhaps, but now effete and harmful. You transformed my silly pride by teaching me the rights of others to work out their own salvation. You made me doubt and deny the heaven-born certainty of the mission of my caste to “lead.” You showed me the physiological absurdity of “high birth,” and the ridicule of taking mere social observances seriously. And all this (and how much more!) without a hard or cruel word, merely with gentleness, tact, and the indirect influence of your beautiful, kind, and serene personality. How was it, then, that, six months after my arrival in the States, I had ceased to write to you and you to me? that in twelve months we had lost all trace of one another? that in a few years I had grown to believe that all the actual product of our friendship was the sweetness of the intercourse of two young souls? Whether

it was quite the same with you, I cannot, of course, be sure, but it seems likely enough. I had nothing to teach you—absolutely nothing. You never took Capital and its interests and obligations seriously. The fact of your father's immense wealth, and the little army of workpeople dependent on him, seemed to have little or no effect upon you. How disinterested you were in your philosophic consideration of everything! True, that in those days your elder brother was being trained for the management of the mills and factories, and you proposed to lead the life of the cultured *dilettante*; but your Liberalism—your Radicalism—I might almost say your Socialism (for as such I now recognise at least portions of your criticisms on the Fact Established)—often called in question the very existence of the whole thing; and so I received it.

‘How is all this changed to-day! Four years ago, in the midst of desperate organising work in Chicago as a Labour agent—or, in your current parlance, I suppose, a “paid agitator”—I suddenly heard your name. The Christian name accompanying it could leave me in little doubt that it was my old friend who had stamped out, with an utterly ruthless energy, perhaps the most justifiable strike against the tyrannous iniquity of a capitalistic house (I mean your father and brother) that had occurred in England within

the memory of man. By degrees I obtained more and more information on the subject, and it ended at last in convincing me of a horrible view of you. I remember well the evening when I first received the unescapable proof of this. Daniel, I went up into my wretched little bedroom in the icy loneliness of that cruel winter's night, with the blizzard lashing the rickety, trembling house, and lay on my face and sobbed (for I could not cry) over all that dear, sweet past of ours, and then rose, with my teeth clenched, and a murderous hatred and scorn of you burning like white-hot iron within me. It was long and long before that passed, and something like the kindly human tolerance we ultimately owe to all who are made of this frail flesh of ours came to me, for you. You see I am just the same vehement, passionate "partisan" that I always was, save, perhaps, that now I have lost the steady self-control which my training as an aristocrat gave me, and this I sometimes regret a little; for though it was based on the hateful sense of superiority over others, still, in this duel to the death of the possessors and the dispossessed, it is an instrument of very great value. Yes, I have grown to loathe and hate and despise my order; but believe me that, if it is possible, I despise and hate and loathe even more the order below it—the Middle class, the Shopkeepers; and this is the one

ground of contact between my past and my present. Let me say at least this for my order. There are still men and women in it ready to admit the New Light, and to sacrifice themselves for it. Show to them the iniquity of their former privilege, and they will, many of them, voluntarily renounce it all, and throw in their lot with the exploited sufferers. Abuse the eighteenth-century French aristocrats as you please, but under Louis XVI. they were, many of them, noble and unselfish to a pitch unheard-of in any other dominant class in all history. But your Middle class—your Shopkeepers? Never, never! At all costs, save sheer “funk,” they must have their pound (and somebody else’s half-pound) of flesh. Oh, I have not lived seven years in the States without realising that the English landlord is an angel of reasonableness and mercy beside the American capitalist; and what is the American capitalist but the apotheosis of the *Mercator Imperator*? I have more hopes (small though they be) of our English gentlemen than of our English plutocrats, and of these last, you, my one time friend, have made yourself one of the most—famous. Do you know the reputation you have among the workmen of the period? For such reputations are international now, and the Labour leader of Chicago or Sydney listens to the story of the capitalistic

leader of London, or Paris, or Berlin. You are more hated and more feared than any one employer in England; and this is the man without whose aid and guidance I should, in all human probability, to-day be the titled master of vast landed possessions, a waster of farms in the interests of game preserves, an expeller of men, women, and children for the sake of hares, partridges, and grouse.

‘My friend (I still call you so, just as I still speak to you with absolute candour, for the sake of the memory of the old time), what should we gain by seeing one another now, and making, as perhaps we should make, the effort to renew the ancient intercourse? Let me recall to you the fact that the very palace (for so I am told it is) from which your letter came to me calls up the most hideous memories. Was it not at the courtyard gates of Felixstowe that a deputation of starving women, with starving children in their arms and at their milkless breasts, came to you at the bitter close of the strike, and told you that, if their husbands could not be taken on again, death stared them in the face? How could I approach those gates, and pass through them, and enter your house as your guest—as your friend?

‘No, Daniel, no! Our paths lie in contrary directions, and must to the end. A chance gave you the means of writing to me. You took it, and

for what you wrote I thank you. It was like a voice coming from the happiest period of my life. I answer you the only way that seems to me worthy of our old relationship, so true, so pure, so noble. Do not think me harsh and Pharisaical. I do not judge you—no, not for a minute. God knows I have had temptations enough in these years of dark and desperate combat, and there have been times when I came near to yielding. For to me, too, beauty and knowledge are very dear—art and music, literature and science. I too would “fain occupy myself with the abiding.” But *that*, I think, can never be. *That* must be for our children’s children, if even for them. But whenever it be, provided only that it be—not for a handful of them—not for a few—no, nor even for many of them, but for *all*—then I should indeed be content! Oh, it is worth fighting and dying a thousand times to possess such a hope!

‘My friend, once more, your hand—for the last time. Good-bye.

‘GERALD HASTINGS.’

## II

Later in the next afternoon, sitting alone in the Russell Square boarding-house, in his bare and comfortless room, and thoroughly wearied out by a hard

day's work, Hastings was suddenly aroused by a knock at the door, and informed by the servant-maid that a gentleman had come to see him, and was waiting downstairs. He followed her heedlessly to the drawing-room, where the gaunt and infrequent furniture looked more than ordinarily characterless and dingy in the one flaring gas-jet that she had evidently just lit. He expected some of his propagandist friends—he did not, in that dreary humour, care to guess which. He found himself face to face with Jack Daniel.

For some moments they stood and looked at one another, motionless and in silence, each recognising how much, and yet (in some way) how little, the other had changed; and then Hastings heaved a deep sigh, and turned his head away.

'Gerald, old man,' said the well-known voice, with just the old musical inflection, 'can't you trust me?'

Hastings looked at him quickly.

The soft, intensely black hair waved round the olive-hued face with its soft, intensely black eyes, full of a kindly, fearless, and simple sincerity, just as of old. The smiling self-security of the beautifully moulded lips and chin was not hid by the slight dark moustache. The physical charm of him, that something which had captivated the English pagan



aristocrat schoolboy from the very moment when he first saw him—that something, too, of the picturesque and oriental element in the habitually calm, yet intensely resolute nature of the swarthy Northerner ;—it was singular how at this moment ‘the full flood-tide’ (as he had said) of all these memories, the sweet and sane physical magnetism, with its spiritual counterpart of serene and perfect sincerity, touched with passion and mystery, caught and overwhelmed him, making him, despite himself, love and believe in his friend once more.

A minute later they were seated side by side on the faded and torturous sofa, talking like two school-boys, Daniel’s arm resting lightly on the other’s shoulder.

‘Now, Gerald,’ he said, ‘I want you to come right off with me. We will get down home in time for dinner, and then we will talk up in a starry turret till the dawn breaks, just as we used to do, and tell one another everything we have been doing and thinking and suffering all these seven years.’

After a short struggle with an already more than half-hearted reluctance, Daniel had his wish ; led him down to the open carriage that was waiting at the door ; put him into it ; got in himself, and they drove off rapidly together.

‘We have time,’ said he, ‘to drive all the way.

We shall be in the fields and lanes in an hour, crossing over into the sunset, and we shall feel the purity and beauty of things breathe full in our faces again.'

'And so,' said Hastings a little dreamily, 'you are married. Have you any children?'

'Yes, three; two boys and a girl, though (happily) the girl comes in the middle in point of order.'

'Talk to me,' murmured Hastings; 'tell me about yourself. Do you know what I feel,' he added, with vague, sad eyes regarding the stream of foot-passengers, 'as I sit here in this luxurious carriage, and watch the pale and piteous faces? Oh, you will have much, very much, to explain to me!'

'Dear man, do you already repent that you trusted me?'

'No, no. I trust you; indeed I do. But it is hard. Perhaps some of those women in shawls there . . .' The vision of the lugubrious procession to the gate of Felixstowe rose before him.

'Oh, talk to me!' he said quickly. 'Tell me all about yourself! What did you do when I left England? Who is your wife? Is she beautiful? Was it she who made you believe in the Established Fact and fight for it? Weak women can do it to the strongest men, just as the fragile ground-creeper grows to strangle the giant tropical tree, and blooms

in a wealth of poisonous honeyed blossom in its dying top before both fall in a common ruin.'

There was a pause.

Then Daniel said: 'I will try and tell you what you want to know, which seems to be the outline of my life since we parted. What underlies this—the spiritual struggle in the dark before I could win my way to any light—we can speak of another time; to-night, if you like, when we are alone.'

The carriage, drawn by its two thoroughbreds, passed swiftly along by unfrequented streets, and the roar of the London traffic died away into a continuous murmur, still loud, but not loud enough to muffle the clear, melodious voice of the speaker.

'You remember,' he said, 'that I wrote one or two letters to you at the ranche in Texas, telling you how Oxford impressed me, and I fancy that even then—that is, before I had been there more than a month—I felt I could not put up with much more of it. It was so obviously merely a continuation of Harrow, and I wanted something fresh and new. I wished to face life as a whole by touching it at many points, and Oxford to-day is at best the clever synopsis of academic futility. My father, chiefly owing to my mother, who had always a blind confidence in me, and to the lethargy consequent on growing ill-health, let me have my own way. I left at the end of the

second term, and went to study in Paris. There, a few months later, I lost sight of you. A letter to you at the ranche was returned to me, with the intelligence that you had gone away and left no address; and it was, I see, just about that time that I discovered I was becoming as hopelessly restless and dissatisfied as I had been at Oxford. Renan was a great personal disappointment to me. A teacher of spirituality and an ideal philosophy was visibly ending an old age of universal disillusionment / in gourmandise, and his ironically epicurean remorse (I mean his remorse for not having been an ironical epicure) was not to my taste. Thus, presently, I found myself in Jena, seeking out Ernst Hæckel, as a sort of moral tonic for a relaxed soul. But there, too, I soon found the old disgust, the old unrest. Hæckel's limitations are fearful. A scientific Philistine with genius, who speaks of France as a frivolous abode of barbarism, and is training up mobs of blatant young tow-heads in the full fervour of this outrageous creed of second-rate Teutonic Chauvinism, could not satisfy me long. Then I went off to Italy and Sicily with a dear little Jew antiquarian, a Herr Doctor of Jena, and helped him to get together materials for a monograph on the Saracens in Europe, till the old restlessness came upon me once again—not this time in the shape of a personal disgust (it

was quite the contrary); but I felt as if I were somehow blindly and unconsciously wasting myself in side-issues, and that the one great subject of my time—the genuine *Zeitgeist*—was escaping me. This made me very discontented, and the more so as I for long and long utterly failed to diagnose my disease.'

He paused, and Hastings listened to him with growing interest.

'Suddenly I seemed for the first time in my life to adequately realise myself, and I cannot tell you what joy my discovery gave me. The social problem was the one great subject of my time. It was the one question that entirely deserved and imperiously claimed a solution. Literature, art, and science were all good and to be pursued with all our strength; but what, as it were, gave the keynote to them all was the social problem. Men are, and always must be, the one supremely important subject to man—men as they live and move and have their being in this actual earth of ours at any given moment. The old solutions were—as any clear-eyed and intelligent person could see—utterly inadequate. What was the new solution? *Was* there a new solution?'

Once more he paused.

'It is strange,' said Hastings, 'how closely, so far, we both developed together.'

'Before this, as you know, I had dabbled in

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Sociology, as I had dabbled in literature, art, and science, though without idea or method. Now I determined to set about it in earnest. And, as in all forms of the acquirement of knowledge two things are necessary—namely, thought and experience, and those come to mean good books and seeing things with your own eyes—I determined that I would go into the East End of London, and still more the South, to study my question on the spot. Well, I had soon the very best opportunities. The religious people—the Salvation Army, and our own Church of England mission workers—received me cordially; and so, after a little suspicion, did the more or less secularising Socialists and Labour propagandists. For I was ready with both hard work and hard cash (up to a reasonable extent), and the combination is too powerful an one to be long resisted. That was five years ago, and I stopped at it for a year without the break of a day, and should have stopped probably for twice as long but for a series of unexpected events.'

'Yes?' said Hastings.

'My father, mother, and brother all died within a few months. The first death I was prepared for; perhaps, even, for the second (for my mother had recently suffered from a severe illness, and she was deeply attached to my father); but my brother's

death—and that means the manner and accompanying circumstances of it—administered to me what was in very reality a rude shock. I knew very little about him. We had seemed from our earliest childhood to have little or nothing in common, and each had gone his own way. Lately he had married, and his wife had died in childbed, the baby succumbing also. For the last five or six years he had practically managed the whole of the Daniel business, and I had not been a soldier, and perhaps I may say a captain, in the Labour army without being well aware how roughly and rigorously he had done it. A severe and neglected cold suddenly developed into violent congestion of the lungs, and a telegram under his name summoned me without delay to his bedside. What followed was beyond expression pitiful. The poor fellow, in his fear that he might be beyond words when I arrived, had dictated a letter to me. The moment I entered, the nurse, at his nervously eager command, read it aloud to me in his presence. It was a passionate appeal to my sense of duty as a man, and my sense of pride as a Daniel, to abjure my lazy and cowardly dilettantism—to take on the management of the business, and to preserve it to our name. I was the last of the Daniels. He could not believe I would let one of the first names in the commerce of England—a name known with honour wherever

the English flag floated—be extinguished, or (what was as bad) pass into the use and abuse of strangers. Then he began to speak. Neither doctor nor nurse could stop him. He had only a few hours to live, and nothing but his terrific will-power kept him from lapsing into unconsciousness. Many thoughts passed through my mind. I had now arrived at certain distinct conclusions concerning the social problem—conclusions of which I was, however, still somewhat doubtful. Six months ago—three months ago—I should have called myself in practice an out-and-out Labour man, and in theory an out-and-out Socialist. Now I felt that I could not do so with any real sincerity. I still *felt* that I was both the one and the other, but I knew that my interpretation of the words would be very different from that of nine out of ten, of nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand, of my comrades. Meantime, my brother's quavering, husky voice went on, abjuring and pleading to my ears, as the devouring seriousness of his death-struck gaze enthralled my eyes. His insensate pride in our name struck me, of course, as antiquated and absurd, but I felt the pathos of the man's agonising soul, and I am inclined to think that it was just this little extraneous human impulse which tilted the balance. All at once I lifted his hand and said to him, slowly and deliberately, that I would take the



business and devote my life to the successful carrying of it on. He gripped me tight with his sharp and bony fingers, smiled, nodded, sighed heavily, half closing his eyes, and was gone !'

Once more he paused, and as they rolled on down the country road, their faces faintly lit with the red sunset, he seemed again to live in that singular and significant scene.

'Well ?' said Hastings softly.

Daniel sighed.

'A fortnight later,' he said, 'I received intelligence from the manager of our largest mills of what he called an *ultimatum* from the men. It was equivalent to a demand for a 10 per cent. rise in wages of the whole of the rank and file, a ten hours' day, and the reform of many abuses of "discipline." I had, indeed, no idea of what was really going on around me till next morning, when a *Pall Mall Gazette* interviewer waited on me with a copy of the last evening's paper, and a request to be permitted to ask a few questions. First, I read the paper. The personal remarks were all passably correct.—I learned subsequently who supplied them. It was one of my Labour friends, who owed me everything pretty well but his existence.'—(He smiled, amused.)—'And so, in the main, as far as I was aware, were the facts concerning the "abuses" in the Daniel mills. They

were all admirably worked up on the usual sensational lines, and I realised like a flash that I was, indeed, as my friend the interviewer assured me, the "man of the moment!" "*What will he do with it?—An East End Socialist Leader succeeds to the mastery of 15,000 workmen!—The Fortunes of the Daniels!*"—and so on. It was very funny. Then the interviewer set on to me: Were the stories of the "abuses" in the Daniel mills true? I believed so. I was going to see.—What should I do? I could not tell. I was going to see.—Had I no definite plan? I had not. I was going to see. And nothing else did he get from me.'

Hastings nodded, his brows slightly contracted.

'Well?' he said.

'Of one thing I was resolved. I would do nothing off-hand or in haste. I went myself straight away to Morven, where the trouble had come to a head, and interviewed the manager at length. Then I interviewed a deputation of the men. Then I tried to interview some of the workmen and workwomen separately. The state of excitement in the mill—indeed, in all our mills—was (I saw at once) intense. I think the workpeople had a vague idea that there was about to be a scramble for the Daniel millions, and that they all had a right to be in it. In three days I was facing at first a suspicious and then a savage

opposition. Suddenly I was given a week's notice to accede to the men's demands, or there would be a general strike. On the top of this, three of my old London friends—Labour leaders—came down, and at once sought me out. I put the matter clearly before them. They began by demurring a little, asking why I didn't accede to the men's demands before, instead of after, my investigation; but ultimately agreed to do their best to avoid the strike; and late the next night I was told I should be given a fortnight, but that, at the end of that time, I must meet the Union (it was an Union now) or take the consequences. One of the three ambassadors told me bluntly that there was nothing else to do but capitulate. He had never seen men more resolute and solid, and public opinion was steadily backing them. Meantime the Press had let me drop somewhat, stirring foreign events having happened unexpectedly; but Tory, Liberal, and Radical newspapers all alike took the same tone of cynical expectation, and in my inmost heart I felt that they would not, from their own point of view, be disappointed.'

'Ah?' said Hastings.

'I began my investigation,' proceeded Daniel calmly, 'and in the teeth of much opposition, working day and night, carried it through, my three Labour friends sardonically "assisting" me. At the end, I

had three clear days in which to mature my proposals, and I insisted on being left absolutely alone. I knew what a momentous decision I was about to make. Several times, I will admit, I felt inclined to throw up my hands and let the men have their own way in everything. For it was utterly clear to me that they meant fight, and savage fight, on any other contingency. Might not these latest Socialistic conclusions of mine be wrong, and my old practical theory of letting the unions practically administer things in their own fashion be right? It was a long and severe struggle, and it might have ended either way. But a new event decided it beyond all question. A threatening deputation broke in on me. This was too much. I came down to the great meeting with my proposals, based absolutely on the new and not on the old conclusions. I had often spoken before in public during the last year in London, but this was obviously something quite beyond all that, and I was prepared for violence. Yet I felt strangely dreamy and lethargic. I suppose I was tired out with the storm and stress of the work. The silence when I rose was acute—almost painful. I could see nobody. It was not till I was well on in my speech, and the tempest was gathering, that I rapidly regained my self-mastery, and all the faces came out as clearly as in the noontide sun. I began by taking the abuses

in "discipline"—chiefly fines for being late and talking and "fooling" during work-hours. Many I abolished; others I reduced to merely nominal sums, even for the old wages received. A low, strong buzzing, distinctly favourable in character, greeted me at the conclusion of the list. Then came the question of salaries. All the overseers leaped up 50 per cent., a few 70 or 80 per cent. All the skilled workmen, the industrial specialists, leaped up in the same way from 30 to 60 per cent. Everything that implied the higher type of work, brain-work, the exercise of thought, judgment, and originality, participated in the rapid rise. Then, without waiting, I took the unskilled, or almost unskilled, workmen and workwomen. I should pay men and women who did the same work precisely the same wages, I said, and I ranked off the divisions before I stated the rise I was prepared to give. At the most it was 7 or 8 per cent.; at the least it was 4 or 5. At this there was a terrible pause, and then the commotion began. I asked for silence, and began to speak of the improvements in the general conditions of the workpeople which I contemplated—houses, schools, libraries, a park, baths, and so on. The uproar kept growing and growing. I still persevered, at moments dominating it, and spoke of a system of pensions. A loud voice called: "Pensions be d——d! We want higher

wages." That finished it. In ten minutes yells for the strike arose. My London friends gathered round me, shouting and gesticulating their remonstrances. I merely shrugged my shoulders, folded up my papers, and went out. It was folly to stop.'

'And on that you fought?' asked Hastings.

'Well, not quite on that. There were many interviews, and I was ready night or day to listen and talk with any of them; but I knew quite well it was useless. The temper of the men was for war, and war they would have. To put it shortly, the Daniel workmen desired three things: the first was to have a grab at the Daniel millions; the second was, if possible, to turn themselves into permanent aristocrats of labour; the third was to pay the rank and file of labour 50 per cent. higher wages, in proportion to the value of the work done, than the captains and colonels. In other words, they intended to sacrifice skill to strength, brain to body, the higher type to the lower. To concede the first two things meant commercial collapse; to concede the last meant the denial of my conviction of what will prove the ruin, social as well as commercial, not only of England, but of all our civilisation—to pander to the fatal vice which seems to me to be inherent in all forms of practical Socialism. Wherefore, on this issue I was ready to fight them, if needs be, to the bitter end.'

‘And you fought—and won?’

‘And I fought—and won!’

Hastings dropped his face moodily.

‘I do not understand your issue clearly,’ he said.

‘It seems to me pedantic, and to inflict all that suffering for pedantry was surely criminal.’

‘Let us discuss the question in the abstract,’ said Daniel, ‘up in our starry turret after dinner. For here we are at the avenue, and the avenue, not being a “palatial” one, will lead us home in a minute or two.’

### III

Some hours later, the two men were lying in easy wicker lounges before one of the bay-windows of the northern turret. The faint glimmer of a single shaded taper left visible the glory of the clear and star-studded night beyond, and, as Hastings said, gave faintly the suggestion of the huge, dark surface of the revolving earth-ball, which seemed to be dipping down over the far eastern horizon, while they followed it towards the line of the swiftly gliding dawnlight.

‘You are happy here,’ he said suddenly, after a long pause; ‘or you seem so. With such a wife, such children, such a home, and a life-work which satisfies your conscience, I might think of you once more in the same cowardly spirit as I did as a lad, as of one

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to be envied. I have never seen another man or woman of whom I had anything approaching such a thought. I may have envied this or that possession of theirs, but themselves never, and it is only my cowardice that ever envied you. Jack,' he added, turning his head quickly, 'tell me truly and sincerely, as from man to man, from soul to soul, *does* your life-work satisfy your conscience? Do you in your clearest and serenest hours of insight and reason, the inspired moments when no self-deception stands erect and unabashed before one's conscious eyes, do you really believe in the social course you pursued and are, I suppose, pursuing?'

'Dear man,' said Daniel, softly stretching out and putting his hand on the arm of his friend, which rested on the arm of the chair, 'I can only answer you that four years' experience of the results of the social ideas which I have, either rightly or wrongly, conceived—four years' careful observation from within and without—(You would smile at my mysterious disguises and aliases. I have worked months on end in my own factories, and those of other employers, unknown to any one but my wife.)—have all the more and more convinced me that humanity at the present moment is menaced with a most terrible danger. It is not anarchy, it is not the "slavery" of which the Individualists are so afraid—at least it is not in the



shape of which they conceive it—and their cure is worse than the disease. The instinct of self-preservation in humanity may be trusted to save us from the suicide of either a red-rampant State Socialism or unrestricted competition; but there is something, as I take it, in which this instinct cannot be trusted, and that is universal and triumphant ignorance, and after ignorance, corruption and sloth.'

He put down his cigarette in the little tray on the smoking-table at his side.

'I have told you,' he said, 'that when I had been six months in the London slums, I had become simply an out-and-out Socialist and Labour man. Socialism was the ideal; Labour organisation, first in unions and then as a political party, the practical means at hand with which to forward the realisation of this ideal. It was not pity alone for the suffering of those people that produced this in me. I knew that in some respects their life was little more piteous than that of the lower and even of the central middle-class above them. In other respects I knew that the masses were absolutely better off. Their existence, if they have health and strength, is often less hopelessly dull and soullessly corrupt. They have at least blood in their veins, not mud, and their life is the wild life of animals, with wild animal pleasures and pains; not the slow corroding cark and care and secret viciousness which

so often reduce the struggling shopman below the level of even a healthy bestiality. Pity indeed played its part in me the more actively that I had no idea of another world than this in which these hapless ones should be compensated by a dispensation of the grim justice Jesus meted out in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. Dives in his lifetime receives his good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but by and by Lazarus is to be comforted, and Dives in anguish. If I could only have discovered pity,' proceeded Daniel, 'on which to found Socialism, then I should have regretfully realised that Socialism was a dream. But when justice showed me that it also, in its strictest shape, was an integral part of this basis, the matter entered a new phase. I need not, I expect, tell you about this in any detail,' he said; 'you know the scientific basis of Socialism as well as I do.'

'I am not sure of that,' said Hastings. 'Let us come to some agreement on that before you go further; for it is important. To me Capital is simply withheld wages—a formula as absolute in its way as the main formula of Evolution. More and more, as it seems to me, is it becoming clear to us all that, in the domain of social science, Karl Marx's definition of Capital holds precisely the same place as Darwin's definition of Natural Evolution in the domain of science. When well-known writers on social topics,

following John Stuart Mill and the *rococo* political economists, discourse concerning the eternal divisibility of Capital and Labour, they talk as Cuvier did of the eternal immutability of species. One shrugs one's shoulders, and discusses something else. Is this what you mean by the scientific basis of Socialism ?'

'Yes, though I should not put it quite in that way.'

'And you no longer cherish that amazing blunder of those from whom we should least expect it; of those who gravely assure us that civilisation does not, by the mere legal inheritance of wealth, paralyse the great law of natural and sexual selection. This was an obvious fact to the slow and sure biological intelligence of Darwin. The non-appreciation of it seems to me an amazing stultification in some of his fellows, who are indisputably dowered with far swifter and more abstract intellects. Science can find no excuse for civilisation in Nature, and surely Herbert Spencer's whole attack on State intervention, because it is based on opposing the struggle for existence and survival of the fittest, is one of the funniest samples of a distressing mental obliquity.'

'Once more, yes,' said Daniel; 'though, once more, not quite as I should put it.'

'You would put it more politely for Spencer?'

Daniel smiled.

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‘Probably,’ he said; ‘but I should try to avoid some slight confusion of thought which seems to me either expressed or implied in your dogmatised polemic. However, that is unimportant. On the main point we are clearly at one, which is that Individualism has not a leg to stand upon when it defends civilisation, as we know it, against Socialism, as we prognosticate it, by alleging that the one is — “natural” and contains the great natural force of evolution as the dominant factor; while the other is “artificial,” and means the sway of dissolution, degradation, and final death. Thus far, we had apparently developed along pretty much the same lines, and I suppose the next question that presented itself to me was the next that presented itself to you too. Granted, the condition of the masses is pitiful; granted, it can be proved to be based on robbery and exploitation, and is therefore radically iniquitous, what can justify this hideous inhuman sacrifice? Clearly only one thing: the impossibility of abolishing it, except at the cost of the ruin of the whole community. If only 30 per cent., if only 20 per cent.—15, 10—nay, even 5 per cent.—can be lifted up to anything approaching a humanly worthy existence, then the 70, 80, 85, 90—nay, even the 95—must, more or less, continue to be virtually sacrificed.’

• Hastings was looking at him askance.

'And so you persuaded yourself in favour of the virtual sacrifice? Oh!'—he burst out, laughing drily—'the modern Annas talks just the reverse of the old one. Culture has taught him that it is better a nation should perish than that one alleged great man should be brought to nought. It was some such rotten gospel of reaction that Thomas Carlyle, the Scots peasant, who ratted on his order like many another *parvenu*, commercial or philosophic, furbished up, here in England, in the interests of his aristocrat patrons, under the Brummagem shape of what he denominates hero-worship—damn him!'

Daniel laughed in turn, but almost to himself, at his friend's savage outburst.

'A devout person,' he said, 'was confidentially telling me the other day that he was quite sure Thomas was eternally damned already. However, you are mistaken as to my powers of self-persuasion in this matter. The great god Expediency did not win my worship on that point. I had the contrary idea. It seemed to me that the danger of the ruin of humanity lay far more clearly in the other direction. No, my friend, I concluded altogether in favour of the attempt to abolish the sacrifice. Moloch, even in his latest revised and amended shape, seems to me somewhat out of date.'

Hastings answered nothing, merely raising his'

eyebrows, and bending his head a little. He thought he had been trapped.

'This,' proceeded Daniel calmly, wishful to dispel his friend's annoyance, 'this was more or less my state of mind at the end of the first six months of my social "Lehrjahr," and there, owing to circumstances, my direct conscious and scientific pursuit of the subject (if I may so call it) suddenly ceased. The results of my "Wanderjahr," or rather "Wanderjahre," came pouring in upon me like a flood. It was not so much in the shape of the facts and experiences of my work, though these also played their part. It was rather as a sort of "Dichtung und Wahrheit" (since I am using Goethe's phraseology) of all my human dreams, my human hopes and aspirations during those ambiguous years. Socialism had become to me a practical creed, based on justice and to be erected with science. It now became to me a religion, with all the poetry of an incalculable future, which, as I take it, is the simple verifiable meaning of what the orthodox people call "heaven."'

He paused a moment.

'I am not,' he said, 'going to expatiate on this now, for it does not concern our subject. I merely mention the fact of this irruption of a portion of my life, the use and significance of which I had before then utterly failed to perceive, and which I had,

indeed, come to look upon as a more or less unjustifiable waste of myself. I mention it now to account in a measure for the nebulous condition of what I have called my latest socialistic conclusions. If I had not been occupied with thought and dream and vision concerning the far future of the race, I should not have been distracted to the extent to which, as it seems to me now, I certainly was, with regard to the path the race must inevitably take if that far future is ever to be realised. Yes,' he went on, unconsciously failing in his purpose of speaking only of the actual subject, and undergoing the sweet, irresistible charm which we all find in our favourite day-dreams; 'yes, if that craving for an immortality of happiness, for a continuous existence of freedom from the cruel combat which Nature delights in, is ever to be satisfied, it can only be by the very best combinations of human intelligence and skill. All creatures own that craving. The birds that build their nests long dumbly, even as we weary humans long articulately, for a city that hath foundations. Watching under the microscope the lowest organisms known to us, I have felt the thrill of pity for these infinitesimal atoms of life which would fain, they too, live and move and have a being. In the chemist's bowls and crucibles I have recognised that the wrestlings of the warring elements prefigured, if they

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did not anticipate, the actual *nisus* of organic life. And how has Nature always achieved the death and destruction of all she creates? First and chiefly, by the needs of hunger, which inevitably make her children either preyers or prey, which make them all the enemies of other forms of life, and threefold the enemies of their own. Some have limited, or striven to limit, by their combinations the horrible ferocity of this. Men, for their part, starting from simple aggregations, have advanced to civilised cities, nations, races. But we have always failed, just as the others have always failed, in every grade of organic life and being, because we never could make our combination at once complete enough within, and powerful enough without. China alone, by a crude but resolute effort after an unscientific State Socialism, has shown the world something of what can be done in the way of racial perpetuity, which is the power of organised racial homogeneity. With us Assyria waxes and wanes before Babylon; Babylon is lost in Persia; Persia goes down before Greece; Greece before the conqueror of Carthage; Rome before the Goths. The weary, heart-sick tale of the ignorant human spider, continuously spinning his continuously ruined web, goes on from age to age, and sardonic and savage Nature, still unsated, contemplates our insane and fratricidal strife, never more



fratricidal and insane than at this very hour. She ruins us through our stupidity. As the capitalistic monopolist, in this her true incarnation, exploits the masses of humanity by merely letting them compete among themselves ; so Nature exploits cities, nations, and races. The ultimate crisis for humanity lies clearly in the hour when the globe shall become uninhabitable. As the moon is, so shall the earth be. Did the cities, nations, and races of the moon go on competing among themselves to the end? Did they see the beauty of Nature's delusive and fleshly smile on fecund land and sea slowly transform itself into the mocking grin of the hideous skeleton of dry, lightless, and heatless death? And did no suspicion of the trick that had been played on them ever cross their minds? Or did the intellectual *élite* of that hapless stock feel, or even realise and recognise it ; but, powerless to control the ineptitude of their fellows, sigh over the "*infinita vanità del tutto*," and steal away to die? Does that same fate await *us*? Or may we some day discover not only the secret of life and of actual physical immortality, but learn how to arrest the cooling of the earth, or, if that be impossible (though to science all things are possible), migrate to another planet? Who can say?—who can say?'

He paused, looking out into the far and all but

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cloudless east, where the first glimmerings of the approaching dawn expanded imperceptibly.

'That,' he said, 'is one's thought—one's dream—one's vision; the ideal, the heaven of the race, and its realisation, is possible—possible through developments of ever-increasing beauty, and force, and wonder. Who shall say No? But one thing is certain: the human problem must be settled first. The danger of the ruined web must be permanently averted. Every faculty of man must be bent to the great work. We must have all mankind to choose from. Food and clothing and housing, refuge from sickness and old age, must be an axiom of human existence. The need for individual selfishness must disappear in that of the race. All energy must go out in the training of the spiritual and mental faculties. Only from a superb rank and file can we hope for a superb army from which we can choose our saviours. We have but one single foe—Nature—the deadliest foe of all, the foe which can be conquered only by intelligence, and enslaved only by comprehension, and which can hold no other place but that of either victor or vanquished, master or servant. Nothing that runs counter to the final settlement of this, the one vital problem of humanity, is to be tolerated. If we cannot read her riddle aright, our Sphinx will surely devour us, just as she

has devoured all the others. Let us bring but one test to every question—to every effort after social progress and organisation—to every law, or would-be law, the blind-worm politicians and propagandists present to us: civilisation as a spiritual and mental unity in infinite variety, but ever as a unity, based on the scientific enslavement of Nature. Two things—the cult, at all costs and all hazards, of intelligence, and the cult, at all hazards and all costs, of the physical satisfaction of the individual; and of these two, if they clash, as ignorance and greed perpetually make them clash, then the first, first!’

‘No,’ said Hastings softly: ‘the second—I still feel that. The second.’

Daniel smiled faintly, looking before him.

‘The second,’ he said, ‘stands absolutely to win. Nothing in the long-run can stop it. But the first stands possibly, and even probably, to lose. The dominant forces are against it.’

Hastings was silent.

‘Such, at least, were the results of my latest conclusions,’ said Daniel, still looking before him. ‘Labour is already for Labour alone, and it will be more and more so, I think—not less and less. Oh! we pity Labour—we pity the masses—we pity the rank and file. But what is that pitifulness of theirs beside the tragedy of the men of intelligence, the

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poets, painters, musicians, sculptors, the writers of talent and genius, the scientists, the inventors, the discoverers? Do you say Labour is exploited? Heavens! if Labour is exploited 5 per cent., talent and genius are exploited 50 and 500. It is brains we want—it is brains which alone can save us, which alone can help us to solve the deadly riddle of the Sphinx. With brains, I say, all things are possible; without them, little or nothing that is of permanent use. Suppose to-morrow every man was paid the just value of his work. Who, do you suppose, would gain? Whose would be the sudden rises of 100 and 1000 per cent.? Why, it is the story of the Morven strike again. Give the masses 7 or 8 per cent. increase of their present wage, and you do them utter and absolute justice. Give the men of talent and genius their increase of 50 and 500 per cent., and humanity is still their debtor. Labour already shows us, wherever it is yet powerful enough to have anything like a free hand, what it really desires; and the civilisation which it rules will be a hell of mediocrity, pullulating into corruption and decadence—at best a China, at worst an easy prey for the first incursion of a more vigorous stock. It will not advance us one step towards the true civilisation, not to say towards the resolution of the great human problem. Already the Labour men

decree that none but a Labour man shall stand by them. Do you guess what that means? It means that the masses are to "exploit" talent and genius to-morrow, just as the classes "exploit" them to-day, for the profit and pleasure of the "exploiters"; and once more the weary, heart-sick web shall be spun by the stupid spider, and Nature shall sit, savage and sardonic, enthroned on our bones, and drinking our blood from her cups of gold, while Time in the grey depths of space waits in his lethargic stupor till she too falls prone in an everlasting oblivion.'

There was a long pause, that grew into a silence, before Hastings heaved a sigh and rose slowly to his feet.

'Jack,' he said sadly, standing gazing at the now ever-broadening and intensifying dawnlight, 'I asked you to tell me truly and sincerely, as from man to man, from soul to soul, whether your life-work satisfied your conscience. Let me speak to you now as I desired you to speak to me, and as I believe you did speak—as you have just spoken. Do I feel that the cause for which I have struggled and lived, and for which I shall, in all human probability, yet die—do I, any more than you, feel, in my heart of hearts and mind of minds, that it will equal our hope and faith in it? I cannot answer, Yes. That cause, I too feel sure, will win—it is bound to win—

because it stands for a newer and truer social idea than that which combats it. Christianity, with all its faults, limitations, and even vices, conquered the Paganism of Greece and Rome, which was far from being without its goodnesses, splendours, and virtues, for just that reason; and thus Socialism will conquer Civilisation. Yes, I feel it—I know it. It may take a hundred years—two—three—four—five hundred years. It will conquer in the end. But that it will do all we—all even I—hope and trust for in it—ah! that is another thing. Jack, let me tell you all. I know, I think, the forces that are really driving us forward, as well as you do, perhaps better. I know which of them will become more and more the dominant forces that must mould and fashion the organised life of humanity in the near future. And there are moments—there have been, and doubtless there will be again—when I have been glad that I have lived now, in the dark and doubtful hours of the night, rather than in the full flood-tide of exultant day. That is all I have to tell you—only a bad dream, perhaps a nightmare. I am very thankful for death.'

Daniel's arm was round his shoulders.

'Dear man,' he murmured, 'be thankful also for love.'

Hastings flung up his face.

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‘Oh no!’ he cried; ‘I don’t falter; I don’t repent—I, with the narrow ideals and the bewildered vision of a desperate hope and a despairing faith. Onward, onward, and upward! Who am I? What am I? What does it matter? The idea is the greatest of our time—the hope the most superb, the faith the most intense. That is enough for me.’

Then suddenly:

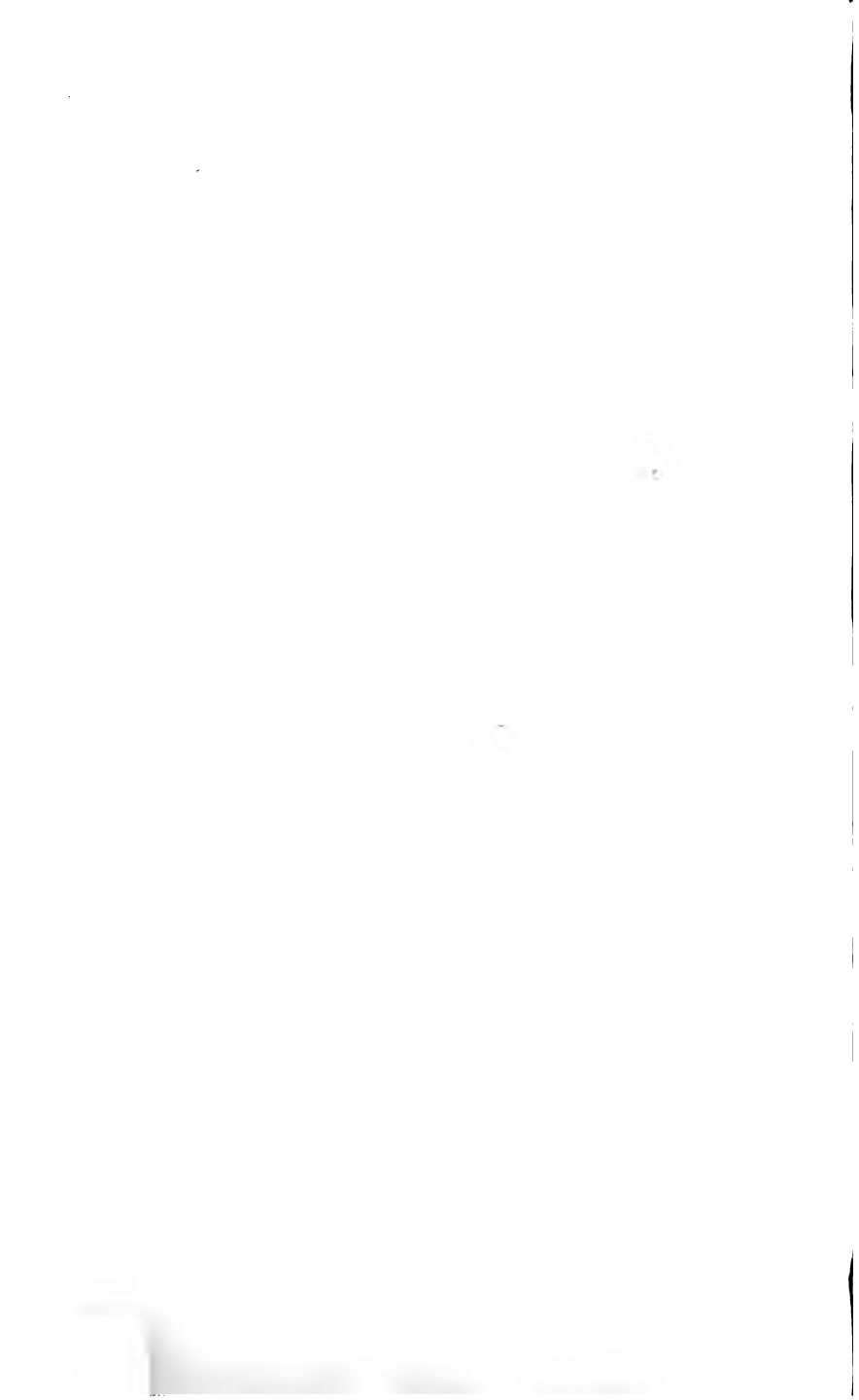
‘*Look!*’ he said, stretching out his hand, his eyes lit, his mouth smiling.

At one steady impulse the sun had surged above the clear horizon line, and soared, huge, round, blazing, and glorious, into the thrilling blue of the heavens.

They stood together in silence, regarding his splendour.

**AN ANGLO-INDIAN STORY-TELLER**





## AN ANGLO-INDIAN STORY-TELLER

It was inevitable that sooner or later some one should make a systematic effort, in the interests (say) of literature and art, to exploit India and the Anglo-Indian life. England has awakened at last to the astonishing fact of her world-wide Empire, and has now an ever-growing curiosity concerning her great possessions *outré mer*. The writer who can 'explain, in a vivid and plausible manner, the social conditions of India, Australia, Canada, and South Africa—who can show, even approximately, how people there live, move, and have their being, is assured of at least a vogue. Several vogues of this sort have already been won on more or less inadequate grounds: have been won, and lost, and the cry is still, They come! From among them all, so far, one writer alone, led on to fortune on this flood-tide in the affairs of men, has consciously and deliberately aimed high; taken his work seriously, and attempted to add something to the vast store of our English literature. The spectacle of a writer of fiction who is also a man of letters, and

not merely a helpless caterer for the circulating libraries and the railway bookstalls, is unfortunately as rare among us as it is frequent among our French friends. Literature and Art are organised in France, and have prestige and power. In England they are impotent and utterly at the mercy of Philistine and imperfectly educated newspaper men, who, professed caterers for the ignorant and stupid cravings of the average English person, male and female (and especially female), foist upon us painters, poets, novelists, and musicians of the most hopeless mediocrity. In France this sort of thing is impossible. Such efforts would only provoke a smile. People would say to you when you were taking seriously a poet (for instance) like Mr. Lewis Morris or Sir Edwin Arnold, or a novelist like Mr. Besant or Mr. Haggard, 'Why, you must be joking! These gentlemen are not writers—are not artists at all. Surely you know that what they concern themselves with is the nourishment of the babes and sucklings who have to be provided with pap somehow; but serious workers, contributors to critical and creative thought—*allez!*' It seems something to be at last able to go to our French friends, and say, 'Well, here at any rate we have a young Englishman who has won a remarkable vogue, and for all that *is* a serious worker, *is* a contributor to critical and creative

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thought, *is* an artist, *is* a writer'—to be able to go and say this, and to advance reasons for our belief in it of sufficient cogency to extort, perhaps, from our friends a genuine assent. If for this alone, we ought to be grateful to Mr. Rudyard Kipling, our Anglo-Indian story-teller.

### I

From the very beginning, Mr. Kipling struck a strong and solemn personal note. To his first booklet, *Soldiers Three*, a collection of seven 'stories of barrack-room life,' and designed to 'illustrate' one of 'the four main features of Anglo-Indian life,' viz. the military, he attached the following sombre, proud, and yet pitiful *envoi*:

' And they were stronger hands than mine  
That digged the ruby from the earth—  
More cunning brains that made it worth  
The large desire of a king ;  
And bolder hearts that thro' the brine  
Went down the Perfect Pearl to bring.

' Lo, I have wrought in common clay  
Rude figures of a rough-hewn race ;  
For Pearls strew not the market-place  
In this my town of banishment  
Where with the shifting dust I play,  
And eat the bread of Discontent.

‘Yet is there life in that I make,—  
     O Thou who knowest, turn and see,  
     As Thou hast power over me,  
     So have I power over these,  
 Because I wrought them for Thy sake,  
     And breathed in them mine agonies.

‘Small mirth was in the making. Now  
     I lift the cloth that clokes the clay,  
     And, wearied, at thy feet I lay  
     My wares, ere I go forth to sell.  
 The long *bazar* will praise—but Thou—  
     Heart of my heart, have I done well?’

Certainly three of these tales constituted something very like a revelation not only of one of ‘the four main features of Anglo-Indian life,’ but also of a new writer of considerable force and originality. Nothing like either ‘The Big Drunk Draf’ or ‘With the Main Guard’ had been presented to the reading public before, and the praise of the long *bazar* was justifiable enough. But as a gallery of characters, as manifest fictional creations, the success of the book is not great. Indeed, here right at the very start, one of the weakest sides of all Mr. Kipling’s work is just the want of this very gift, on the assured possession of which he seems to pique himself. His characterisation is never excellent; often it is mediocre; sometimes it is abominable. He cannot escape from his own subjectivity. Never was work more acutely personal than his. Never did a writer

consciously or unconsciously insist with such passionate persistence on the special form of *milieu* which has given him what he feels to be (so far, at least) the dominant factor in his view of things. And this is why, in nine cases out of ten, his *dramatis personæ* melt away so rapidly in the memory, leaving us with nothing but the impression of an admirably piquant and clever delineation. He has probably spent more time and trouble over his 'Soldiers Three,' Mulvaney, Ortheris, and Learoyd, than over any other of the characters of his tales; yet Mulvaney alone is recognisable as anything approaching an organic creation. Mr. Kipling sacrifices everything to his mordant individuality. Mulvaney, the drunken, pugnacious, loquacious, kindly Irish ruffian of the old school, will tell you how 'Brazenose walked into the gang wid his sword, like Diarmid uv the Gowlden Collar,' and will not mention the name of the Queen in ordinary conversation without devoutly invoking upon her the blessing of the Creator! Ortheris, the little vulgar rascal of a cockney, urges his comrade on to an adventure with the quotation:

'Go forth, return in glory,  
To Clusium's royal 'ome:  
And round these bloomin' temples 'ang  
The bloomin' shields o' Rome.'

And, when he is rebuked for loquacity under trial,

inquires: 'D'you stop your parrit screamin' of a 'ot day when the cage is a-cookin' 'is pore little pink toes orf?' Similarly a regimental carpenter likens the splitting open of a boat to 'a cock-eyed Chinese lotus,' or a London street-girl entreats: 'But cou—couldn't you take and live with me till Miss Right comes along? I'm only Miss Wrong, I know, but I'd,' etc. etc. Well, I respectfully submit that the speaker here is Mr. Rudyard Kipling, not Mulvaney, nor Ortheris, nor another. Instances of this sort of utterly inartistic insertion of little bits of Mr. Rudyard Kipling into Mr. Rudyard Kipling's 'rude figures of a rough-hewn race' are very plentiful, and are certainly not edifying samples of the way he shows his godlike 'power over these.' But how, when taken from the larger point of view, this defect limits the value of his criticism of the main features of Anglo-Indian life, which he designs to 'illustrate'! To-day we are all full of eagerness and curiosity to know of what sort our short-service soldiers are. Mr. Kipling dedicates his booklet to 'that very strong man, T. Atkins,' who is surely the very person in question. But what does he tell us about him? Little or nothing. It is the old long-service man who is his game. Into the mouth of Mulvaney, who gives us most of the military criticism, is put the ancient and stock abuse of the short-service

system, backed up with the stock and ancient chauvinism about the glory and gain of the good old gentleman officer, all of the olden time, the individual with the courage of a mastiff and the brains of a rabbit. The poor old Irishman in his degradation is even made to consolingly kick himself with the reflection that, if he could have kept out of one big drink a month, he would have been an honorary lieutenant by this time, 'a nuisance to my betters, a laughin'-shtock to my equils, an' a curse to meself.' And thus we settle the modern military question, incidentally throwing in a few jeers at Lord Wolseley as a drawing-room man, who doesn't know his business. With what heartfelt rapture, on the other hand, do we approach the sacred exhibitions of the Old Style! Take the first toast at the mess, which is the same as Mulvaney's loyal conversational prayer. 'That Sacrament of the Mess,' says Mr. Kipling solemnly and deliberately in his own person, 'never grows old and never ceases to bring a lump into the throat of the listener, be he by sea or by land. Dirkovitch' [a mere unregenerate Cossack] 'rose with his "brothers glorious," but he did not understand. *No one but an officer*' [the italics are mine] 'can tell what that means; and the bulk,' etc. etc. Now, what I want to know is this: Does Mr. Rudyard Kipling, in his most calm and disillusionised



hours, in the dead unhappy night, and when the rain is on the roof, seriously believe in this sort of thing? There are other excesses to which the sightless tradition of the old hide-bound Jingoistic, Anglo-Indian officialism leads Mr. Kipling, but they are excusable and even defensible. It is only abject silliness which can be neither defended nor excused. None the less, he carries some of these excesses to considerable length. Dickie, the most gentle and lovable of his male characters, blind, and going to his death, 'stretches himself on the floor' [of a carriage in an armed train at Suakim] 'wild with delight at the sounds and the smells' of the machine-gun, pouring out lead through its five noses upon hapless Arabs, fighting for their freedom in their native land. "'God is very good—I never thought I'd hear this again. Give 'em hell, men! oh, give 'em hell!" he cried.'

The exceeding goodness of God in relation to Englishmen and 'niggers' seems always to consist in the opportunity and ability of the former to give the latter 'hell.' Never once in his tales does Mr. Kipling appear to be aware that these same miserable aliens may have a point of view of their own—they also. There is always the tacit assumption of the fact that they are made merely to be fought with, conquered, and ruled. I am not quarrelling with

this genial and enlightened manner of treating the 'inferior races.' I am only saying that in the case of Mr. Rudyard Kipling it makes one feel how much less interesting and valuable his criticism on the Indian people is than it might be.

Pieces of his description of fighting have been spoken of as unique. Wonderful as was his first effort in this direction, the 'jam' in 'the gut betune two hills, as black as a bucket an' as thin as a gurl's waist,' where the Pathans waited, 'like rats in a pit,' for the onslaught of the two regiments, one of which (the Black Tyrone) 'had seen their dead'—wonderfully as this was presented in the Mulvaney brogue, when Mr. Kipling trusted to himself alone he did better and achieved a masterpiece. 'The Drums of the Fore and Aft' is one of those performances which are apt to reduce criticism to the mere tribute of a respectful admiration. It is absolutely and thoroughly well done. It 'explains' everybody and everything. We follow the raw-recruited regiment step by step in the process of its demoralisation. We feel the approach of the inevitable catastrophe. Equally clear is the demonstration of the personal incident of the two little drummer-boys, who are to be on this occasion the chance gods from the machine. It all passes before us like a piece of illuminated life. And with what dramatic power

is it all gathered together and swept forward to the culminating scene, where the two lads step out from the rocks with drum and fife, 'and the old tune of the old Line shrills and rattles.' Then from the purely descriptive writing which follows, take a specimen like this: 'The English were not running. They were hacking and hewing and stabbing. . . . The Fore and Aft held their fire till one bullet could drive through five or six men, and the front of the Afghan force gave on the volley. They then selected their men, and slew them with deep gasps and short hacking coughs, and groanings of leather belts against strained bodies.' Scarcely less fine is the charge of the Lancers, which 'detached the enemy from his base as a sponge is torn from a rock, and left him ringed about with fire in that pitiless plain. And as a sponge is chased round the bath-tub by the hand of the bather, so were the Afghans chased.' Whenever Mr. Kipling touches on a battle-scene, especially a *mêlée*, he writes with this absolute mastery of it all. It is real pictorial magic. The charge of Arabs on the square on the Nile bank (*The Light that Failed*, chap. ii.) is too long for full quotation here, and too good to be mutilated; but the following may be taken as a sample of the way in which he can render a personal incident in such surroundings. It is from a tale in

his last book, *Life's Handicap*, 'The Mutiny of the Mavericks,' which is for the most part a bad piece of special pleading, but which ends with this admirable portrayal of the madness of a coward: 'Dan and Horse Egan kept themselves in the neighbourhood of Mulcahy. Twice the man would have bolted back in the confusion. Twice he was heaved, kicked, and shouldered back again into the unpaintable *inferno* of a hotly contested charge. At the end, the panic excess of his fear drove him into madness beyond all human courage. His eyes staring at nothing, his mouth open and frothing, and breathing as one in a cold bath, he went forward demented, while Dan toiled after him. The charge checked at a high mud-wall. It was Mulcahy who scrambled up tooth and nail and hurled down among the bayonets the amazed Afghan who barred his way. It was Mulcahy, keeping to the straight line of the rabid dog, who led a collection of ardent souls at a newly unmasked battery and flung himself on the muzzle of a gun, as his companions danced among the gunners. It was Mulcahy who ran wildly on from that battery into the open plain, where the enemy were retiring in sullen groups. His hands were empty, he had lost helmet and belt, and he was bleeding from a wound in the neck. . . . Dan and Horse Egan, panting and distressed, had thrown

themselves down upon the ground by the captured guns, when they noticed Mulcahy's charge. . . . The last of a hurrying crowd of Afghans turned at the noise of shod feet behind him, and shifted his knife ready to hand. This, he saw, was no time to take prisoners. Mulcahy tore on, sobbing; the straight-held blade went home through the defenceless breast, and the body pitched forward almost before a shot from Dan's rifle brought down the slayer. The two Irishmen went out to bring in their dead.'

'Description,' said Byron, in his riper time, when he had begun to understand himself a little, 'description is my *forte*.'

It is also Mr. Rudyard Kipling's.

## II

The second of the four main features of the Anglo-Indian life is the domestic, and Mr. Kipling chooses *The Story of the Gadsbys* as his typical illustration of it. The difference, however, between the 'domestic' and the last of the four, which he calls the 'social' feature, is slight, and the latter term is quite comprehensive enough for the two. Here, indeed, he is on his special ground. Here his critical limitations do not come into play; his pet prejudices and theories are unaffected, and he sets himself to render Anglo-Indian 'society' as seen

and felt from within as well as from without, with an unimpeachable disinterestedness. *The Story of the Gadsbys* showed, in at least one scene of that dramatised 'tale without a plot' ('The Tents of Kedar'), a really remarkable gift of dialogue. It was true drawing-room comedy of a high order, and indeed throughout the whole of the piece the talking and gesturing of the puppets were undeniably actual. In the *Soldiers Three* there was a piece of first-rate dialogue ('The Solid Muldoon,' pp. 45, 46, the talk between Mulvaney and Annie Bragin); but it is obviously one thing to write two pages of conversation and quite another to write eighty. The characters chosen for analysis, however, are on a rather low plane, and prove tedious when treated at such length. Seven pages of the silly delirium of a silly girl are rather too large an instalment of predetermined pathos on one note, coming on the top of two even larger and more monotonous instalments of honeymooning and conjugal 'tiffing.' An obviously much-experienced I.C.S. man of his has a happy phrase for the Anglo-Indian 'society' ladies, married or single. He calls them 'fire-balloons,' and every type of 'fire-balloon,' from the empty-headed little girl aforesaid (whose maiden experience so soon corroborates the touching aphorism of her maiden friend that 'being kissed by a man who

*didn't* wax his moustache was like eating an egg without salt'), through the savage man-exploiting Mrs. Reiver, up to Mrs. Hawksbee, 'the most wonderful woman in India,'—every one of them he treats with a loving, patient, and elaborate detail. Some of them are not worth it, 'the most wonderful woman in India' among them (he dedicates *Plain Tales from the Hills*, with a mild fatuity, 'to the wittiest woman in India,' who must run that terrible Mrs. Hawksbee close); but others are drawn with the hand of a master, and are among his most living creations. The same is to be said of many of the men.

Here, then, we have at last the Anglo-Indian 'society' life of to-day, and we see it from every side. Duty and red-tape tempered by picnics and adultery—it is a singular spectacle. But we are to ascribe much, very much, to the climate. Simla holds 'the only existence in this desolate land worth the living.' For the rest, it is six months purgatory and six months hell. 'One of the many curses of our life in India is the want of atmosphere in the painter's sense. There are no half-tints worth noticing. Men stand out all crude and raw, with nothing to tone them down, and nothing to scale them against.' For instance, we speak of 'all the pleasures of a quiet English wooing, quite different

from the brazen businesses of the East, when half the community stand back and bet on the result, and the other half wonder what Mrs. So-and-so will say to it.' Thus Minnie Threegan competes successfully with her 'poor, dear mamma' (who is not precisely a widow) for Mr. Gadsby, who, in his turn, throws over Mrs. Herriott (also apparently not a widow to any alarming extent) in order to enter into the matrimonial 'garden of Eden.' Out of the six tales specially designed to 'illustrate' the 'social' feature, five are based, some more, some less, on the Seventh Commandment. In the way of short stories Mr. Kipling has done nothing better than the three central ones—'At the Pit's Mouth,' 'A Wayside Comedy,' and 'The Hill of Illusion'; the last containing the most admirably sustained piece of dialogue he has yet written. The other side to the picture of the reckless, light-hearted revelry of the Hills is to be found in the doggedly heroic work of, at any rate, the male portion of these people down in the Plains. Picnics, rides and drives, with garden-parties and promenades, are suddenly forgotten in a scene like this:—'The atmosphere within was only 104°, as the thermometer bore witness, and heavy with the foul smell of badly trimmed kerosene lamps; and this stench, combined with that of native tobacco, baked brick, and dried earth, sends the heart of



many a strong man down to his boots, for it is the smell of the Great Indian Empire when she turns herself for six months into a house of torment.' The temper induced by this sort of thing, when mixed up well with fever and finally flavoured with cholera *ad libitum*, is scarcely likely to be lamblike.

'It's an insult to the intelligence of the Deity,' observes one of the sufferers, 'to pretend we're anything but tortured rebels.' Who shall be surprised, then, that when the tortured rebels go away for a holiday to 'the only existence in this desolate land worth the living,' they are devotees of the gospel of eating, drinking, and being merry, for only too obvious reasons? At the bad times this same gospel leads to astonishing effects in the way of kindness and self-sacrifice. A savage Stoicism holds all things cheap, even death. 'Bah! how these Christians funk death!' It is the grim and contemptuous jeer of the eternal heathen, whose heart says to him with a fraternal candour, 'Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return, and what on earth does it matter?' Yet what a depth of passion and emotion lies in these Stoics, and how paltry and factitious all other men seem beside them—children babbling of the moon or cowards sucking at their spiritual opium pipes to drug their 'funk' into 'faith'! Mr. Kipling loves his heathens with

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all his heart, and even the silliest of his 'fire-balloons' seeks not succour 'from on high' in the troubles and agonies of 'life's handicap.' As for his men, they have all more or less of the nature of the eternal barbarian, the atavistic impulse of ruthless action which lies so deeply and so ineradicably in almost all of us, under the thin veneer of our civilised refinement and 'good manners.' Speaking of his Dickie, he calls it the 'go-fever, which is more real than many doctor's diseases, waking and raging, urging him, who loved Maisie beyond anything in the world, to go away and taste the old, hot, unregenerate life again—to scuffle, swear, gamble, and live light loves with his fellows; to take ship and know the sea once more, and by her beget pictures; to talk to Binat among the sands of Port Said, while Yellow Tina mixed the drinks,' and so on. Very little respect or care has he, therefore, for those who shout to us perpetually, 'Great is the Respectability of the English people!' 'Oh, you rabbit hutches!' cries out Dickie, in the black hour of his poverty in London, 'do you know what you've got to do later on? You have to supply me with men-servants and maid-servants'—here he smacked his lips—'and the particular treasure of kings. Meantime I'll get clothes and boots, and presently I will return and trample on you.' Strange,

passing strange, that in the throat of men who talk like this a lump should rise, 'be they by sea or by land,' at the mystic formula which sums up the cult of the Sovereign who doesn't rule. Yet such, it appears, are we English, a 'peculiar people' in all conscience. Nor is even the saving grace of humour denied to our Anglo-Indian story-teller, to temper the foolisher aspects of that bilious and fiery jingoism of the devastated and terrible clime. The preface to *Life's Handicap* is a delicious proof of this, and paragraphs, sentences, and phrases that have the true piquant flavour are rarely to seek. Yet his touch is never certain. His false characterisation has its parallel in false criticism, sometimes merely the smart superficialities of the imperfectly educated journalist (to whom culture stands for nothing more than 'culchaw'): at other times quite shocking tributes of respect and admiration to tenth-rate personages. Mr. Kipling knows little beyond modern English prose. The secret of the art and literature of the great Continental peoples is hid from him. He is too young, and he has lived too hard, not to be considerably in the dark about himself. How else is one to explain the insertion of work absolutely vile and detestable in his latest book? The *sacra fames auri* might explain its composition; but it is another thing in the full flood-tide of your vogue, with name,

and fame, and fortune all at your hand, to write in this way of your work :

‘The depth and dream of my desire,  
The bitter paths wherein I stray,  
Thou knowest Who hast made the fire,  
Thou knowest Who hast made the clay.

‘One stone the more swings to her place  
In that dread Temple of Thy worth—  
It is enough that thro’ Thy grace  
I saw nought common on Thy earth.

‘Take not that vision from my ken ;  
Oh, whatso’er may spoil or speed,  
Help me to need no aid from men  
That I may help such men as need !’—

to write like this, and then to present to us such unspeakably mediocre and wretched stuff as ‘The Lang Men o’ Larut’ or ‘Namgay Doola’! ‘Under any circumstances, remember,’ says the sagacious Dickie, in his final character as the pictorial journalist in the heyday of his London vogue, ‘four-fifths of everybody’s work must be bad. But the remnant is worth the trouble for its own sake.’ Very true: but is this any reason that a man who can give us such a splendid sample of story-telling as ‘The Courting of Dinah Shadd,’ or touch the very spring of the *lacrimæ rerum* in the piteous narrative of ‘The Man Who Was,’ should proceed to inflict on us work which even the most sympathetic criticism can only designate as beneath contempt? Mr. Kipling asks too

much of his most devoted admirers when he leaves them to try and justify the existence of 'Namgay Doola,' and 'The Lang Men o' Larut, and 'The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney.' Balzac could not afford to sign his name to such rubbish. For Mr. Rudyard Kipling to do so is to send snakes to strangle his reputation in its cradle.

### III

'In India,' he says, speaking in his proper person, 'you really see humanity—raw, brown, naked humanity—with nothing between it and the blazing sky, and only the used-up, over-handled earth under foot.' One of the results of the overwhelming nature of this fact is that, at any rate in any close consideration of the 'native feature,' you are soon driven to take refuge in 'simpler theories' than those current among the benighted English home officials. Herein, of course, is the great difference between these and the Anglo-Indian officials. The latter have ever treated the 'native feature' from the 'simpler theory' point of view. Hence the stupendous success of our Indian administration, as an administration, from the days of Clive to those of Lord Lytton and onwards. Our sympathetic comprehension of the races we have ruled, our intimate knowledge and appreciation of

their religious and social feelings : all this is due to the 'simpler theories' of our Anglo-Indian officials, civil and military. The events of the year 1857 were the crowning proof of it. In that year we simplified even these simpler theories into the one simplest theory of all. 'We gave 'em hell' to an extent that they have never forgotten, and Mr. Kipling smiles knowingly over the still active native prejudice against being blown away from the mouths of cannons. The foolish person in search of a little disinterested information about things may find the so-called Indian Mutiny an unexplained historical phenomenon, and eagerly hope for some enlightenment on the subject from a writer of indisputable talent who is 'illustrating' the 'native feature.' He will get little or none from Mr. Kipling. Firstly, he will find the scantiest mention of, or even allusion to, the social movements of the natives. They are viewed merely (as we have seen) in the light of a huge mass of raw, brown, naked humanity to be manipulated by the civil and military officials for the arcane purposes of the Great Indian Empire, or by the inspired amateur detective (Strickland is Mr. Kipling's name for him) as material for his dexterous energy and sagacity, or by the male portion of the Anglo-Indians as a happy hunting-ground for more or less animating, if monotonous, sexual experiences 'without benefit of clergy.'

We see the officials perpetually hustling the childlike natives about all over the country. We see Strickland, or somebody else, not quite so clever perhaps, but still far too clever for childlike natives, perpetually exposing their villainies. We see rows of Anglo-Indian bachelors of all sorts (some the most commonplace sorts) inspiring dark-eyed little native girls with doglike adorations. But that is all, or almost all, and it is scarcely a workable statement of the great Indian equation, even from the 'simpler theory' point of view.

There is in these narratives all the ability of the thoroughly good story-teller we know, here and there bits of excellent dialogue (the final scene in 'The Sending of Dana Da,' for example), the same exquisite little descriptive cameos, the same rapid and piquant dogmatism—one has nothing less to praise here than in the tales of the 'military' feature, but unhappily also nothing more. Now and then vivid touches seem to bring us into contact with the peculiar and essential nature of the more active members of the alien races, and we realise for a moment something of the qualities in them which have made history; but how rare and partial such glimpses are! Thus Mr. Kipling shows us the Afghan Amir in his Court, and 'the long tail of feudal chiefs, men of blood, fed and cowed with blood.' But such

things are not his game. It is the little personal experiences and the 'begetting of pictures' from the same that he is keen for. This is what interests and absorbs him. 'If I were Job ten times over,' says one of his characters in the most unnatural manner for the character, and in the most natural manner for Mr. Rudyard Kipling, 'I should be so interested in what was going to happen next that I'd stay in and watch.' And he makes his Mrs. Hawksbee repeat the sentiment. 'Colour, light, and motion,' he says elsewhere with his own voice, 'without which no man has much pleasure in living.' He loves the demonstrative instinct of the Oriental. 'You cannot explain things to the Oriental. You must show.' He has in him, too, the Oriental love of story-telling for its own sake; and even their superstition strikes a responsive chord in him. 'I have lived long enough in this India,' he says, 'to know that it is best to know nothing'; and on the force of this he mars a little masterpiece like 'The Courting of Dinah Shadd' with a large allowance of second-rate second-sight prediction, which is all fulfilled to the letter. I cannot tell whether it is simply due to the benumbing chill of incredulity, but his deliberately supernatural tales, from 'The Phantom Rickshaw' downwards, impress me as distinct failures. On the other hand, when he deals in natural horror (take 'At the Pit's



Mouth' as a sample, or 'The Other Man') I often find him admirable.

But do not let me seem to strike with too great insistence the note of depreciation and disappointment. That would be to be unjust as well as ungracious. The best Mr. Kipling has to give he gives, and the best of that best is veritably good, and what more should we ask of him? Nowhere in his more elaborate efforts to delineate child-life (and some of them are something rather like successes) does he give us so perfect a piece of work as the little child-idyl called 'The Story of Muhammad Din': nowhere does his gift of natural horror find more artistically harrowing expression than in 'The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows,' or in 'Bubbling Well Road': nowhere does he paint the 'ewig Weibliche' with a more liquid depth of simple love than in 'Lispeth' or 'Beyond the Pale.' And all of these are stories that illustrate the 'native' feature.

There is one obvious quality in all literary work without which the name or fame of a writer has no possible chance of survival, and that is the literary quality. Its manifestations are many, far more diverse, indeed, than jejune critics like Matthew Arnold will admit. Arnold loved to quote a line of Sophokles above a line of Homer, a line of Dante below a line of Shakespeare, and to assure us that these were all

perfect samples of 'style.' The fact is, that of style in the sense known to Sophokles or Milton, Shakespeare and Homer had little, and Dante had less. Shakespeare achieves his unique effects through a verbal magic unequalled in the world's literature. No man ever created such lines and phrases. Dante (to take his case alone) wins by something quite different—by a sheer and simple sincerity of outlook. He watches, and watches, and watches, till he sees things before him with an actuality that burns achingly into his sight, and what he sees he puts down simply—as he sees it; but style in the sense of Sophokles, verbal magic in the sense of Shakespeare, he has little or none of either.

Our business here is obviously with things on a smaller scale, but the same line of judgment must be held as with those of the largest. No one can claim for Mr. Kipling the possession of a real prose style, or, indeed, of anything approaching to it. He cannot even, at least in this respect, for a moment be placed beside his French contemporaries and fellow-story-tellers—Maupassant and Bourget, let alone the great names of French and English prose. Such style, *quâ* style, as he has is mere journalistic smartness, and he never begins to do good work till he has consciously forgotten all about it, and has set himself down to paint his 'pictures' or express his emotions as he

best may. Neither has he that sheer and simple sincerity of outlook, that patient and relentless realism which (for example) lifts the best work of Zola so high. His youth and ardour, worked to white-heat by the Indian climate and his hard life, have intensified his individualism to such a pitch that he cannot get out of himself—cannot render any one or any thing objectively. The types he hates he caricatures, and mingles up men, and women, and children with puppets tricked out in semblance of the same, with a splendid want of discrimination. What side, then, of this precious, this indispensable quality does he possess as the 'Open, Sesame' of the years to come, where newspaper 'boomers' cease from troubling and serious workers are at rest? The reply can happily be given without much hesitation. Beyond all question (to put it in the particular form) he has the gift both of the happy simile and of the happy phrase. 'You pass through big still deodar forests, and under big still cliffs, and over big still grass-downs swelling like a woman's breasts; and the wind across the grass, and the rain among the deodars says, "Hush—hush—hush."' A touch of verbal trickery here, and Nature is rendered purely in the focus of the spectator's subjectivity, but how well she is rendered! Or, again, 'A large, low moon turned the tops of the spear-grass to silver, and the stunted camel-thorn-

bushes and sour tamarisks into the likeness of trooping devils. The smell of the sun had not left the earth, and little aimless winds, blowing across the rose-gardens to the southward, brought the scent of dried roses and water.' He is almost as keen a connoisseur of scents and smells as M. Guy de Maupassant himself. He realises their powers. Several such samples have been given already. Here are the Himalayas from the nasal point of view: 'The monkeys sang sorrowfully to each other as they hunted for dry roots in the fern-wreathed trees, and the last puff of the day-wind brought from the unseen villages the scent of damp wood-smoke, hot cakes, dripping undergrowth, and rotting pine-cones. That is the true smell of the Himalayas, and if once it creeps into the blood of a man, that man will, at the last, forgetting all else, return to the hills to die.' Admirable, indeed, are these little descriptive cameos which he strews broadcast. Sometimes they are enclosed in two or three lines. 'The witchery of the dawn turned the grey river-reaches to purple, gold, and opal: and it was as though the lumbering barge crept across the splendour of a new Heaven.' Again he achieves the same result in one single epithet. '*The drinking earth*'—three words to describe the drought-laden Indian land under the heavy, unceasing downpour of the longed-for, welcome rains.

‘Nothing save the spikes of the rain without and the smell of the drinking earth in my nostrils.’ Verbal magic of this sort is of the poet: it is thrown out whole, so to say, not constructed. Or take this: ‘There was nothing but grass everywhere, and it was impossible to see two yards in any direction. *The grass-stems held the heat exactly as boiler-tubes do.*’ No more: not another word. Veritably in Art the part is ever greater than the whole. But it follows that when he deliberately sets himself down to exploit this supreme gift of his, he succeeds but moderately. ‘The City of Dreadful Night’ may be taken as a good example. It is excellent better-class journalism, and all the third-rate ‘word-painters’ are in raptures over it; but (alas!) it is not the third-rate, nor the second-rate, nor even the first-rate ‘word-painters’ who precisely know what they are talking about, let alone what people twenty years hence will talk about. Yet (alas! once more) for how much do they and their wrong-headed praise and indiscriminating enthusiasm count in the creation of vogues! Must a man ever owe three-fourths of his temporary success to his defects and limitations? Smartness and superficiality, Jingoism and aggressive cocksureness, *rococo* fictional types and overloaded pseudo-prose, how much too much have these helped to make the name of our young Anglo-Indian story-

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teller familiar to the readers of the English-speaking race all over the earth !

Grant to him, however, as we surely must, the possession of verbal magic, of this striking aspect of our precious and indispensable literary quality, and add to it such gifts as have been enumerated in our short review of his work, and surely the case for taking it and its creator seriously has been well made out. On the other hand, we must not for a moment lose sight of the fact with which we started in our consideration of his claims to a permanent literary position. We are dealing with things on a scale which can only be called small, and his limitations, his aberrations, are very real and very grave. The time is past when a writer of talent could win such a position, even for a generation, by the most nimble and vivid variations of a 'criticism of life' adapted to the use of the nursery or the schoolroom. Loud-tongued, fractious, and numerous though it still is, the Noble Army of Blockheads no longer exercises that perfect tyranny it did fifteen or twenty years ago. It is yet able to dispense the loaves and fishes, but its judgments, overwhelming though they be for a short time, are being perpetually upset by the small but evergrowing section of the public that begins in Art and Literature to know its right hand from its left. It will not be long before people come to tell

Mr. Kipling that they are sick to death of his continual efforts to galvanise his most puppetlike puppets into the dreary semblance of life. 'No more Mulvaney, Ortheris, and Learoyd, an you love us! No more Mrs. Hawksbee, and Strickland, and Mrs. What's-her-name! They are only visible and palpable object-lessons of your inability to create characters!' Mr. Kipling is young and full of vigour: what are we left to infer from the undeniable fact that the ascending force in his work is very slight? Nay, we might even question its existence. His work has not gone on improving in his successive efforts. He has never excelled 'The Big Drunk Draf,' or 'The Drums of the Fore and Aft,' or 'At the Pit's Mouth,' or 'Gemini,' each in its special style, and these (if I do not mistake) are all from his earlier period. There is nothing in any degree better—shall I say there is nothing in any degree so good?—in the whole collection of stories gathered up in *Plain Tales from the Hills* and *Life's Handicap*. Any attempt to classify Mr. Kipling, to give him a place, and his true place, in our modern fiction, would be premature. Hope (which, according to the Latin phrase, is 'the expectation of good') clings to this saving clause. But after his next book will this still be so? What should we make of another huge slice of 'The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney'

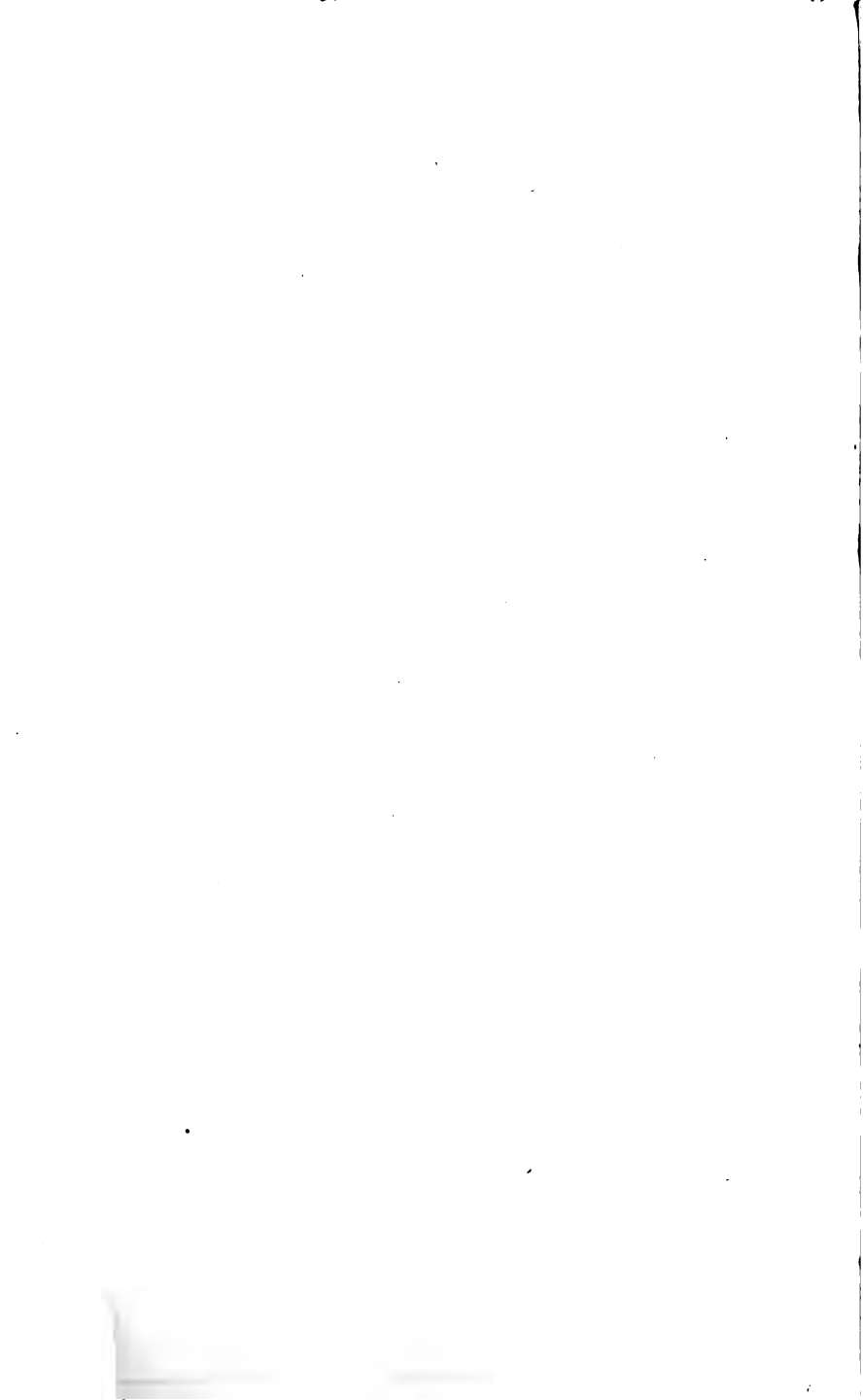
style of thing, and 'Namgay Doola,' and 'The Lang Men o' Larut'?

But, once more, let me not seem to strike the unjust and ungracious note of depreciation and disappointment, especially at the close. We should be thankful for what we have got ; but, if we chiefly show our thankfulness by energetically asking for more, let us not fall under the suspicion of want of generosity. The case, we say, for taking Mr. Kipling seriously has surely been made out beyond cavil. His vogue may pass—it seems passing somewhat already ; but, at least, we shall not be able to declare of it, as of so many of its fellows—and, indeed, of some which seem at this hour to stand above all such changes and chances—that it was won on such inadequate grounds that a total extinction and oblivion were, in mercy to the vileness of the English artistic taste, its most expedient as well as its worthiest fate. That can never be said of the man who could describe Anglo-Indian society as in 'At the Pit's Mouth,' who could tell a story like 'The Courting of Dinah Shadd,' who could do a piece of such splendid analytical and dramatic work as 'The Drums of the Fore and Aft.'





THE POETRY AND CRITICISM OF  
MR. SWINBURNE



## THE POETRY AND CRITICISM OF MR. SWINBURNE

### I

'ATALANTA IN CALYDON'—'POEMS AND BALLADS,'  
FIRST SERIES—ESSAY ON BLAKE

MR. SWINBURNE'S poetical career really opens with the production of *Atalanta in Calydon*. In *Chastelard* was to be found the luxuriant, the over-luxuriant, promise of lyric and epic, but not of dramatic, power. It is true that *Atalanta* is modelled on the Greek and not on the English drama, and that the two dramas are so different in character, that a complete comparison is wellnigh outside the limits of technical art. At the same time the dramatic spirit, the intense feeling of perfect parts in a perfect whole, is to be found as much, if not more, in the *Agamemnon* than in the *King Lear*. The music in the one case is simple, in the other complex, but the *motif* is identical. This dramatic spirit is felt but faintly in not only *Chastelard* and *Atalanta*, but all Mr. Swinburne's plays. They have not got it, they have

got the effort after it, and in *Atalanta* the effort is strenuous; but effort is not achievement, and never will be. Follow up Mr. Swinburne's dramatic work to its culmination, and what do we find? *Bothwell*, the apotheosis of prolixity, the most tiresome alleged 'masterpiece' of the time. How to describe it? How to give it a place? How not to admit that it is nothing but a vast piece of perverted ingenuity? a poetical Great Eastern that is only good for splitting up into match-wood? Mr. Swinburne calls it a 'drame épique,' and with this label round its neck let it float away, a gorgeous cripple, into the realm of forgetfulness.

On *Chastelard* and *Atalanta* followed the *Poems and Ballads*, and on the *Poems and Ballads* followed the *Notes* thereon; and the lines on which Mr. Swinburne's work was to run were laid down. The *Poems and Ballads* are a wonderful and extensive insistence on the over-luxuriant promise of his lyric power. There is not one truly satisfactory poem in the book. It is the production of a 'marvellous boy,' but that is all. Mr. Swinburne from the start was cursed with a fatal facility. One of his early critics, the *Morning Star*, congratulated him on 'writing French chansons' in *Chastelard*, 'of which Chastelard or Ronsard might have been proud.' Alas! Mr. Swinburne had the gift of writing a good many

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other sorts of poems, of which their respective originals might, as the *Morning Star* would doubtless assert—if it did not happen just at present to be ‘shining in death, the Evening Star among the departed’—might be proud. Those ladies, for instance, of whose virtue Boccaccio is so careful to assure us (for their innocent little tales had resulted, it seems, in a nickname for him which was not altogether a pleasant one), if permitted to listen with understanding ears, might indeed have been surprised to hear how skilfully yet another of their ballads was ‘blown with boy’s mouth in a reed,’ pulled in a northern and Puritanic clime and after so many hundred years. But we should not seem to disparage this gift of Mr. Swinburne’s. It has its value, but not a value great enough to justify the prominence assigned to it in his first collection of poems. Here it is often little short of a trick, and often altogether an affectation. Now, how good and excellent a thing it is, brethren, to have a ‘Masque of Queen Bersabe,’ a real ‘miracle play,’ accurate even to this charmingly verbal extent :

‘He shut his two keen eyen fast  
And suddenly woxe big and brast  
E’re one should tell to nine.’

The transition to phraseology like the following has,

however, not quite so 'fiery a fidelity,' as Mr. Swinburne says, to historical truth :

'I am the Queen of Lesbians,  
My love, that had no part in man's,  
Was sweeter than all shape of sweet.'

And so on. To tell the truth, it reads rather more like an adapted extract from a poem called 'Anactoria,' where the fidelity of historical truth is also not as fiery as it might be. Nor is this trick the sole one here. There is the detestable trick of pure word-play, from the thralldom of which Mr. Swinburne has never quite freed himself. Did he not write the *Sestina* in the second series of *Poems and Ballads, stans pede in uno*, in the presence of at least three credible witnesses?

There is not a truly satisfactory poem in the book. It might easily be retorted that no one claimed that there was: that this is in reality only a first book, and that it is foolish to be emphatic about it. All this would be true enough if one were not ready to follow up Mr. Swinburne's lyric work and point out that, of the vast number of his poems, those which *are* truly satisfactory can be counted on the fingers, and perhaps on the fingers of one hand. It is all, or almost all, over-luxuriant promise and over-luxuriant fulfilment. There are verses and snatches in this first book that are lovely beyond words; but a verse

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or a snatch does not make a poem. Take four lines like these :

‘Alas, but surely where the hills grow deep,  
Or where the wild ways of the sea are steep,  
Or in strange places somewhere there is death,  
And on death’s face the scattered hair of sleep.’

Or the opening verse of ‘A Leave-taking,’ or of ‘Itylus,’ or of ‘Fragoletta,’ or of ‘A Match,’ or one or two of the verses in memory of Landor : all are of the purest note—we have none purer—but all are, as it were, throttled by their surroundings. Hugo’s Muse reminded Heine of a pretty woman with two left hands : Mr. Swinburne’s has four, and they all pile up materials at once ! He justly calls his first book a ‘revel of rhymes.’ But unhappily the revel has continued. ‘Laus Veneris,’ the poem from which the first quotation is taken, has a hundred and six verses ! Heine would have done it in under fifty. But Heine makes ornaments of his gold, while Mr. Swinburne uses it all up for goldbeater’s skin. Let us pass for a moment to the book which contains Mr. Swinburne’s highest lyrical efforts—*Songs before Sunrise*. The ‘Halt before Rome’ has forty-six verses : twenty-three, or even eleven, would have done. ‘Before a Crucifix’ might have found full expression in sixteen verses instead of thirty-three. In the second series of the *Poems*



*and Ballads* he reaches his zenith in pure style and execution. But 'In the Bay' has forty verses instead of the quite sufficient twenty. His want of mastery over style, in Schiller's sense of the knowledge not of what to write but of what to omit, is simply dreadful. He seems to think that he will achieve immortality as, we are told on such excellent authority, the heathen thought to achieve a divine hearing, by much speaking. What a fundamental ignoring (for in his case it cannot quite be called ignorance) of the Art to which his life has been devoted! The world is full of experience, and very weary, and the sole vice for which it has no tolerance is the vice of tiresomeness. This is its one condemnation. Be tiresome, and your chance of survival is as the writer of a song, a snatch, a line. For tiresomeness is the everyday word for the factitious and the untrue, and neither perverted skill nor bungling shall endure.

It is, then, just this particular epithet, tiresome, that has to be applied to so much of Mr. Swinburne's work. Take a poem like 'Anactoria'; the alleged evolution of which he has himself been at pains to point out in his *Notes on Poems and Ballads*. In reality this evolution is quite fanciful. The whole poem is one long, sterile insistence. The most remarkable fact about it is that a man of real power

could be found who should sit down at the poetical piano and play a few chords so many, many times in succession. Young men and women, enamoured of the last waltz or patter song, will do this sort of thing and escape alive, but that is only because centuries of purposeless torture and death have taught us the supreme value of patience. Furthermore, speaking of 'Anactoria' and that poor Sappho whose 'supreme head of song' Mr. Swinburne has 'vexed' so endlessly in both poetry and prose, one has to notice that his poetical insistence has not the effect of emphasis but quite the reverse. In poetry, if anywhere, the part is greater than the whole. An extract from 'Anactoria' and its fellow-sinners (and what extracts one can make !) is worth more than the poem in its entirety, which is all but unreadable. Indeed, from no writer of our time can such appetising extracts be made as from Mr. Swinburne. If he were to be judged by these alone, his place would be with our highest ; but the memory of a man's beauty is not perpetuated by the fact that he had a superb knuckle or an irreproachable calf.

It is the same with Mr. Swinburne's criticism, so inchoate and unsatisfactory as a whole. When he begins to generalise he is lost. So long as he confines himself to individual poems with which he is in accord, he is more than worth listening to ; but let

him touch on individual poems with which he is not, and still more on personal comparisons, and we shall get nothing further from him than the rhodomontade of his loves and hates. In this first section we have only to deal with his first outburst, although it is possible enough that, chronologically speaking, this outburst does not exist within any well-defined limits. None the less his work, as it seems, can be divided off into three parts, each with its fairly distinctive and specialised quality.

Two powers have perpetually struggled for him, self-abandonment and self-restraint, and this struggle has been carried into every branch of it. What is most admirable in *Atalanta* is just this—the effort after artistic self-restraint. He joins a perception of Æschylus and Euripides to a perception of Sophokles, of Sophokles who ‘saw life steadily and saw it whole.’ In the same way his criticism then felt the (to him) sanitary influence of Matthew Arnold, and the ‘*haute critique qui part d’enthousiasme*’ of the author of *William Shakespeare* was not despotic. What has just been called Mr. Swinburne’s first outburst is that portion of his work which we have already been considering, its final poetical and critical outcomes being the first *Poems and Ballads* and the essay on Blake. From this we pass to the second part, where the better influences of his temperament bear

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fruit, and all, or almost all, of his best work is to be found.

### II

‘SONGS BEFORE SUNRISE’—‘POEMS AND BALLADS,  
SECOND SERIES’—‘ESSAYS AND STUDIES’

The *Songs before Sunrise* have been spoken of as Mr. Swinburne's highest lyrical achievement, and the second *Poems and Ballads* as his highest achievement in pure style and execution. His highest achievement in criticism is indisputably the *Essays and Studies*. But in all of them we are soon forced to feel the disquieting element of the transitional. He will not rest and give completion to his work. He is the Prodigal Son of our poets. If he has thrown away a pound to-day, why, what more does that mean than that he will throw away a hundred to-morrow? And with all this is the recurrent perception of the beauty of scholarship. Mr. William Rossetti speaks once of his friend's ‘usual exquisite tact of diction, corresponding to a clear intellectual perception,’ and calls him ‘a perfect Hellenist.’ This is what Mr. Swinburne likes. He protests over and over again that he is ‘a student,’ nay, a ‘rational student.’ It is quite comic! If it were not that the problematical joke about the *Revue des deux Mondes*

reviewers remained the sole piece of fun that is to be found in his writings, one would suppose that his protests of spiritual super-sanity in his last attacks on Matthew Arnold<sup>1</sup> were not serious. And yet he really does perceive the beauty and strength of scholarship, and in some of these essays we find an effort after their perfection which is strenuous and almost successful. The essays on Byron, Coleridge, and Ford are the only criticisms of his that give the impression of anything like harmonious wholes. Those on Rossetti and Arnold are, in some ways, a step forward, but a step that is less sure. When we get to the review of *L'Année Terrible* we have reached the connecting link between the second part of his work and the last. The self-abandonment has begun. 'These divers waifs of tentative criticism,' he says, with an oblique look at lost harmonious wholes. 'The one object,' he says again, 'which gives to this book whatever it may have of unity, is the study of art in its imaginative aspects.' Yet the book is a noteworthy one. It is full of scraps of really valuable criticism. And more. The intuition which as early as '67 saw that Arnold 'if justly judged must be judged by his verse and not by his prose' was a fine one. The remark is somewhat excessive. Arnold, for good or for evil, is to be judged by both ; but, in

<sup>1</sup> *Essays and Studies*, 2nd edition, p. 170.

the face of a really extraordinary insistence on all sides that the prose was all and the poetry next to nothing, it says something for the critical intuition of the man who could flatly deny this. This judgment on Arnold is not taken as a solitary example. Mr. Swinburne has rarely failed to recognise high fellow-workmen, and his recognition has been followed by praise, if sometimes forced, almost always generous. In his pet affections as in his pet aversions (to have spoken ill of the former is at once and for ever to make a man one of the latter) he has been extreme; but on the whole he has been loyal to his perception of high fellow-work, if not of high fellow-workers, and that, for a man of letters, is something—nay, it is much. Let us take some samples of his criticism of individual poems.

Here is Arnold's little poem, 'Requiescat.' 'Without show of beauty or any thought or fancy, it leaves long upon the ear an impression of simple, of earnest, of weary melody wound up into a sense of rest.' How admirable! Again: Rossetti's 'song of the sea-beach, called "Even So," which dies out with a suppressed sigh like the last breath or heart-beat of a yearning, weak-winged wind.' (There is a little touch of 'preciousness' here, but that is nothing.) And critical scraps like these are to be found *passim*. Add, then, that same unerring intuition which recog-

nised and bore unflinching witness to the high work of contemporary men not yet properly recognised—Hugo and Arnold as poets, and Rossetti and Morris (to speak only of this book of *Essays and Studies*)—and we must be ready to admit the debt of gratitude we owe to him for his powerful and fearless exposition.

Turn now to the accompanying poetical work—the recent *Poems and Ballads* and the *Songs before Sunrise*. Enough, and perhaps more than enough, has been said of the faulty elements in them. But no work of Mr. Swinburne's is as satisfactory as this ; to no work can we return again and again with equal pleasure. 'A Forsaken Garden,' despite a memory of the poetical method of Browning, has already won its place as a possession of all poetry readers, and that is a fact of more significance than the superfine young critics are wont to admit. Browning, again, has a finger in 'At a Month's End,' and the poem is over long ; but it is not tiresome, and that allows one to see that it is fine. 'A Wasted Vigil' appears as the best expression of one of Mr. Swinburne's not too numerous poetical moods, which he is only too frequently repeating, and is fine also. But when we get to 'Ave atque Vale,' we get to something very like that *rara avis in terris*—a masterpiece. What a fortunate hour was that in which the essentials in him all met together and, calmed by death, spoke with

sincerity! Mr. Swinburne has praised 'Thyrsis' generously and well, and here he has written its fellow. Forgetting an occasional verbal flaw, this poem passes into the company of *Lycidas*. The reasons why Mr. Swinburne's masterpiece should be found in an elegy, and in an elegy on Charles Baudelaire, are not far enough to seek to need expressing here. It suffices to remark that the poem is (let us, then, say it) flawless, perfect, and that its equals in our time are to be counted on the fingers of one hand. Our modern paganism has found its final expression, if not of life, then of death. Our Catullus has journeyed over many lands and seas, dark with doubt and despair, to tell us of whatsoever of good and sweet death has for us, death that is and death that will be.

'Nous reconnaissons, courbés vers la terre,  
Que c'est la splendeur de ta face austère  
Qui dore la nuit de nos longs malheurs ;  
Que la vie ailée aux mille couleurs,  
Dont tu n'es que l'âme,  
Refait par tes mains les prés et les fleurs,  
La rose et la femme.'

It is Gautier, it is Baudelaire himself, transfigured, passing from the shadow of life and death into the sunshine of perpetuity, that speak to us in their own tongue this sweet and magnificent trust!

And there are other poems in this book which, if



they do not reach to the high level of this one, are yet distinctly admirable. Such are the verses 'In Memory of Barry Cornwall,' 'Inferiæ,' 'A Ballad of François Villon,' 'Song,' 'Choriambics,' 'At Parting,' and the 'Dedication.' But even in these the old complaint has to be made of want of artistic self-restraint, want of the sense of perfect parts in a perfect whole. There is scarcely a poem in the book from which some lovely or splendid snatch of song cannot be taken, but the nucleus inspiration is so often lost in a side-play of colour, scent, and sound. Take 'A Ballad of Dreamland,' for instance: the first verse so beautiful, the others all beaten out, till high pleasure is swallowed up in vague disappointment. The translations from Villon are excellent. But the fatal facility comes out in the French and Latin poetry and the sonnets. It is the fashion at present to praise Mr. Swinburne's sonnets, but they are not the real thing. They are brilliant and hard, intense and artificial, mere *tours de force*, without genuine vitality or permanence. And the same must be said of almost all his French efforts. He declares once of Gautier that 'sa parole de marbre et d'or avait le son.' Something of the same sort of thing has happened here. Charming, however, is such verse as that 'Ad Catullum,' and sweet such verse as this from the 'Nocturne':

‘La nuit écoute et se penche sur l’onde  
 Pour y cueillir rien qu’un souffle d’amour ;  
 Pas de lueur, pas de musique au monde,  
 Pas de sommeil pour moi ni de séjour.  
 O mère, ô nuit, de ta source profonde  
 Verse-nous, verse enfin l’oubli du jour.’

Is there any French poet who would be ashamed to sign it?

When we come to the *Songs before Sunrise* we come to what Mr. Swinburne evidently looks upon as an important spiritual development in himself. In a *Prelude* which is often as singularly suggestive of the letter as of the spirit of Arnold’s wonderful ‘New Sirens,’ he draws attention to this. The sincerity and inevitability of the development are rather problematical. ‘Love’s passion is played out, let us then take to the passion of politics,’ is the burden of it. But how, Mr. Swinburne would say, can you be troubling about the sincerity or inevitability of the thing when it is expressed to you in music such as this is? But Mr. Swinburne, with his pretty theory that ‘the excellence of verse justifies its injustice,’ loses sight of the fact that the spiritual element enters into the very texture of its actual expression, and, if this spiritual element is wanting in a certain quality, the actual expression of it will be wanting also. When, and only when, in Mr. Swinburne his essential qualities all meet together and, made clear by some

absorbing cause, speak with simplicity, is the result something like a masterpiece, a poem flawless in detail, perfect in conception. It wants all this to restrain his vagabond imagination. Then, too, in poetry such as most of these songs are, he has the temptation of his imperfect sense of melody. Here, more than anywhere else, he makes apparent the gift which as a worker he has done so much to give to our poetry—movement, rapidity, speed; and here, too, more than anywhere else, is apparent the want of both delicacy and variety in his music. His sense of regular rhythms and metres is splendid; his sense of melody was never even remarkable. His blank verse is often brilliant, never sovereign. He must have a brass-band or nothing. Then there is his alliterative trick, which ends in positive disgust. Could parody go further than a line like

‘Spy, smirk, scoff, snap, snort, snivel, snarl and sneer’?

Or, to take an example from the *Songs*, how ineffective are lines like this:

‘Through flight and fight and all the fluctuant fear’!

It is something very like balderdash.

There is still more to say. Mr. Swinburne’s democracy has not the genuine ring. The trail of the amateur-enthusiast is over it all. What democracy is, what it means, and what it wants, is wholly

outside his view, as indeed it is, with perhaps one or two exceptions, outside the view of every well-known writer of our time. Indeed, this pseudo-democracy, this apotheosis by light-headed schoolboys of the 'People, the gray-grown, speechless Christ,' is, unless viewed as a merely poetical exercise, rather disgusting. It is one thing to sing of Socialism, the Socialism of the Italian Unionists, of the French Anti-Imperialists, of the Russian Nihilists: these are for the most part men and women of education, or, in the usual terms, gentlemen and ladies; and the enthusiastic lady or gentleman poet can enter into their point of view; but it is quite another thing to sing of the peasants and mechanics, labourers and trades-unionists, whose aims, whether for ultimate good or evil, are not in the least grasped and understood. This makes it that, of the democracy sung of in these *Songs*, only that part which has to do with the individuals who are not real democrats can for a moment be viewed seriously.

Let us now take a glance at the *Songs* themselves. Everywhere in them will be found—and to a really remarkable extent—evidences of the old, the irrepressible, the fatal facility. The poverty of thought in them is terrible. Take such a poem as the 'Hymn of Man.' Not all the prodigality of music and imagery in it can hide the want of real, not to

say sovereign, thought. It is brilliant, it is ingenious, but it is not great. Again, take 'Hertha,' a poem which has some superb snatches in it: the same remark has to be made. Professor Clifford, indeed, eager to show that the mathematical mind could appreciate the *fine flow* of poesy, took the thing *au pied de la lettre* and discoursed on its 'cosmic emotion.' Perhaps it was encouragement from some such unexpected source that induced Mr. Swinburne to say to himself, 'Go to, I will also write a poem on "Genesis,"' and the precious poem on 'Genesis' was the result. It would be interesting to have the opinion of the fiery but grim scientific realist, Herr Hackel, upon its scientific value—Herr Hackel, who has knocked together the heads of poet and teleologist with an admirable impartiality. He could not have a finer example of 'the painter in glowing colours of the wonderful mystery' to be derived from a few popular scientific text-books than our English poet. He has very few ideas, and those he does to death, sometimes amazingly so. For instance, there is his ceaseless phrase, 'spirit of sense.' It or its equivalent occurs at least four times in the *Songs*, three times in the second *Poems and Ballads*, five times in the *Essays and Studies*, and elsewhere. The origin of it is Shakespeare's Troilus, the Keats of Shakespeare (according to Mr. Swinburne); and Lord

Tennyson has it too in the shape of 'sense and soul,' and Mr. Browning as 'spirit-sense,' as probably every poet in some shape or other. To Mr. Swinburne it gives an explanation of all individual psychology.

What a relief it is to turn from clever, 'vamped-up,' and improperly digested work like this to such pure and lovely poems as 'The Pilgrims' or the 'Dedication to Mazzini'! Perhaps no more gorgeous and ringing burst of passionate song is to be found in our literature than the last sixteen verses of the 'Mater Triumphalis.' Take verse like this as an example of the genuine political sincerity ('The Halt before Rome'):

' Surely the day is on our side,  
And heaven and the sacred sun ;  
Surely the stars and the bright  
Immemorial inscrutable night' ;

or the song-burst of the three verses further on, beginning 'The blind and the people in prison.' The poem, however, has rather poor stuff in it (the seven verses beginning 'Whose hand is stretched forth upon her?'), and is too long, which is really irritating where parts are so fine. The opening of the 'Quia multum amavit,' a poem of the same order but a better example, has a varied music too rare in this master of regular and rhymed rhythms and only regular and rhymed rhythms. Everywhere there are

fine lines and snatches of songs sweet or impassioned (the first two verses of 'To Walt Whitman in America,' or the first verse of 'The Oblation,' for instance, or others from the 'Mater Dolorosa' or 'A Marching Song'). The studied work, set pieces like 'Siena' and 'Tiresias,' have in them the taint of over-deliberation, a taint curiously demonstrable by the exceedingly fine extracts that can (as usual) be made from both. This is once more a case of the extract giving too high a notion of the whole. Verse like

'. . . Her palace stands  
In the mid city, where the strong  
Bells turn the sunset air to song,  
And the towers throng,'

is very lovely. The quiet insight that we feel in much of the monologue of 'Tiresias' is as pleasant as it is unexpected. Here and there it is like Keats, the Keats of *Hyperion* :

'I am as Time's self in mine own wearied mind.'

Or again, with a richer and more individual colour :

'Ye forces without form and viewless powers  
That have the keys of all our years in hold,  
That prophesy too late with tongues of gold,  
In a strange speech whose words are perished hours.'

One is set wondering whether verse like this will not after all be able to carry on such a poem unshattered down the stream of time. The final poems have

several of high quality. Such are 'An Appeal,' or the first ten stanzas of the 'Epilogue,' which have loveliness—loveliness coloured and animated with 'the patience of passion.'

### III

#### SUBSEQUENT WORK

It is not necessary to criticise in detail the third portion, the subsequent work of Mr. Swinburne. There is positively no sign in it of any new development except for the worse. Indeed, if we omit that slight tendency to greater excellence in workmanship which marks the second period, there has been, as we see, no new development from the beginning. He began as a 'marvellous boy,' just as his master, 'our sovereign poet,' 'our supreme poet,' 'the great tragic and prophetic poet of our age,' and so on, began as a 'sublime infant.' The 'sublime infant' died a 'sublime infant' at the mature age of eighty odd; and the 'marvellous boy' is no less a 'marvellous boy' as the author of *A Century of Roundels* than of the first *Poems and Ballads*. Verily, these men have the unreflective gift of perpetual youth, an enviable gift indeed in a time which is nothing if not repressed and broken with the weight of analytical age. Mr. Swinburne's freedom from the restraint of



anything but his own personality has rapidly increased with years. For, being one of these happy souls to whom thought is not a necessity but rather a nuisance, he has grown less and less to care for such an absurd thing as balance. His ravenous emotions have made an end of him at last. Like his master, he has caught up a few poor ideas from here and there, and used them as a peg on which to hang the gorgeous vesture of his work, and been satisfied. Writers of 'leaders' in our newspapers understand this operation best, perhaps; but the poets have often run them close.

What, then, remains of value in the man's work? Just those parts of it, we say, of which he probably takes least heed—a line, a snatch, a verse, a song, scarcely any of them containing the qualities on which he would insist as his most peculiar excellence.

To have to repeat all this in detail, in considering his later work, would be as wearisome as it would be stupid. It would also be both ungrateful and ungracious. The fortunate hours have come less and less frequently with the poet as success and authority have loosened the bonds of self-restraint, until at last he has gone far towards turning his lyre into a barrel-organ. One puts down a book like *A Midsummer's Holiday* or the *Sisters* with the weary sense that there was little reason any of it should have been

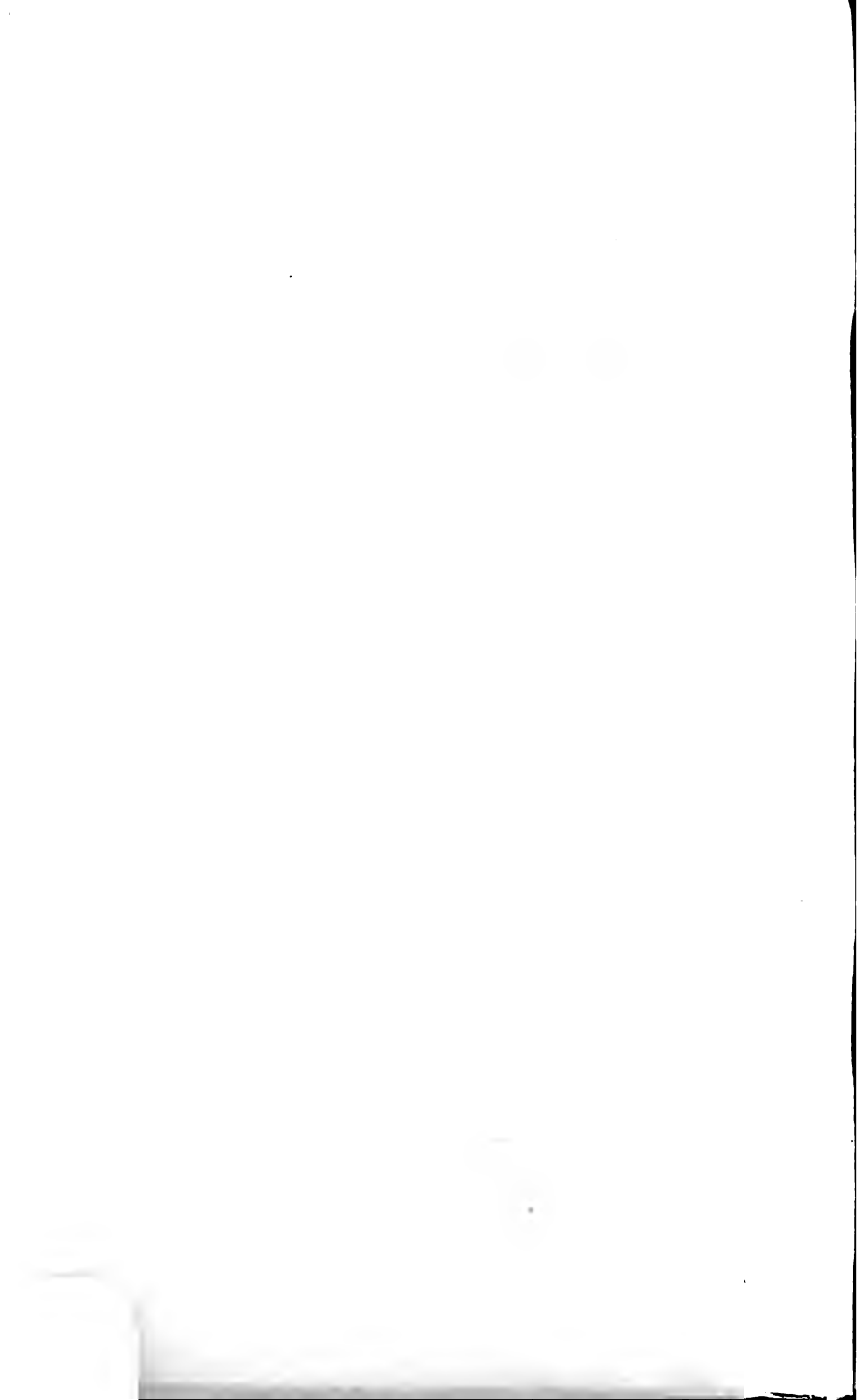
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written, and none at all that it should have been published. It is far pleasanter, and indeed juster, to look back upon what is really satisfactory in the work of this erratic, factitious, passionate, myopic, but most real poet of ours, the inspired schoolboy of Parnassus.

Let us recall the power and fearlessness of his exposition ; the instinct which has so often put its finger onto vague artistic notions floating about in the critical atmosphere, and made their actual truths perceptible to us all ; the special scraps of criticism really valuable. Let us recall the snatches of incomparable song, the wonders and splendours of rushing rhyme, the incomparable, gorgeous glimpses of face and form which we have had in our progress through the tropical jungle of his poetry. Then let us pause a moment in front of the shrine of a masterpiece ! that rarest of terrestrial gifts, dipping our fingers in the holy shell, bending our heads to the wonderful image of Life and Death and Beauty which has made the three names of Baudelaire and Swinburne and Immortality sound as one.



## **SOME RECENT NOVELS**



## SOME RECENT NOVELS

IN the domain of what is loosely called Literature, each decade has its special samples of a noisy popular success, or of a half-success only less noisy. They come and go—these plagues of time, as blissfully unaware of their predecessors as of their followers, large and small, poorly clad and richly clad, of every size and description, crowding to their doom. The same shouts of enthusiastic welcome which greeted the appearance of the chartered mud-gods of yesterday greet those of to-day, and will greet those of to-morrow. Is there nobody to say that all this has happened again and again, and will yet happen again and again, just because the average readers who do not think, and the average readers who think a little, all require momentary mouthpieces for the brains or want of brains that is in them?

Take first the noisy popular successes of the day, beginning with a lady. Mrs. Humphry Ward started with *Robert Elsmere*, and she has proceeded with *David Grieve*. Since Daniel Deronda, has the

dreadful mind of woman succeeded in constructing such an appalling automaton of a female prig in black coat and breeches as Robert Elsmere? How abject is its failure as a creation, as a character, as a recognisable human being! How utterly tiresome and tenth-rate as an embodiment of any species of sublunary 'thought'! Whence, then, the astonishing success of the book? From the simplest causes. Here you have expressed for you the respectable religious liberalism of the hour. And it is absolutely and completely revised and amended up to date and not a day (not an hour) over—nothing inserted, nothing left out, which could shock or fail to attract the good masquerading Philistines and Philistinesses who work our woe. It is charitably to be added that some of the sub-characters, especially the women, are realised a little more adequately; and then there is a piquant platonic love<sup>v</sup> intrigue, intensified by the base alloy of personal caricature. For, after all, it was Mrs. Ward's first actual book, and under all the intellectual flummery of her hapless 'theology' lay the gift of clever, partial, and spiteful observation which is the heritage of the everlasting daughter of Eve. In her second book she found her little personal store all but exhausted; she was urged on by the cheering coteries to a higher flight, and the results all round were disastrous.

Was it, for example, indeed totally unconscious, the audacious paraphrase of Marie Bashkirtseff and her journal which constitutes the whole working material of the only passably interesting section of this wearisome compilation? But why should one ask? The whole book is nothing but a *rifacimento* of other and better books. Here it is *Wuthering Heights*, here it is George Eliot, here it is somebody else. To read it, is like drinking glass after glass of water stale and stained with the rinsings of many wines. In a few years the salt and turbid tide of British religious liberalism will have advanced a little, and then *Robert Elsmere* will be forgotten in the rapture of some other equally mediocre book which more or less expresses that little, and the general stupidity of existence will in no wise be diminished. *Wuthering Heights*, however, will still be to the good, and (though in a considerably lesser measure) so will Marie Bashkirtseff, and therein lies all the consolation possible to the disinterested friend of Literature, and his species.

Equally simple are the causes of the success of Mr. Hall Caine, whom we may take as another variant of the same species, and equally inevitable is his imminent doom. The spectacle is pathetic as well as absurd, because the unhappy man apparently looks upon himself and his work seriously. He does



not know that his vogue is the mere sum total of the appreciation of thousands of imbeciles at a given moment of their development, and that he has only got to live a few years to see that development pass into a new phase wherein he will have no place. Yet what a chance he had, in all that huge and untouched mass of local colour afforded by 'the little Manx nation'! One thinks of what Tolstoi has done, with regard to the old life of the Caucasus, with a fraction of the amount. And all, absolutely all that Mr. Caine could make of it was to produce dead characters moving in dead scenes, the ghastly old fictional types, tricked out with the apparatus of pseudo-'sagas,' pseudo-'prose-poems,' and heaven knows what not, with just enough pretension about the method to make countless shoals of silly people, tinged with the current claptrap culture of the hour, think they were indulging in something intellectually superior. With open mouths they read the author's thanks to Mr. Brown, member of the Manx Legislature, for valuable information concerning the amorous proclivities of the Manx cats; or saw how Rabbi Jones was dragged in to guarantee the burial customs of the sausage-sellers of the Sahara; or learned that Herr Robinson had courageously read all the proof-sheets of the New Saga and had escaped alive to tell the tale. But how, in this year of grace

1892, when we still have Mr. Gladstone and the critically poverty-stricken with us, this sort of thing still takes!

Let us have samples of Mr. Caine's actual work. Here is a glimpse of the heroine of a book which, as he declares, 'is less novel than romance and less romance than poem':

'After that night, Naomi's shyness of speech dropped away from her, and what was left was only a sweet, maidenly unconsciousness of all faults and failings, with *a soft and playful lisp that ran in and out among the simple words that fell from her lips, like a young squirrel among the fallen leaves of autumn.*'

The more one reads and reflects on this passage and on the hundred similar gems of description which can be found in any of his novels, the more wonderful and absolute appears his mastery over that unctuous, fatuous, idiotic, pseudo-poetic 'high-falutin' which is the despair of his rivals in popular bathetical pathos.

Now let us see how Mr. Caine's men and women live and move and have their being in the enchanted realms of his art. Almost any passage taken at random will do. Here is one:

'That same day the poor black boy bade farewell to Israel and Naomi. He was leaving them for ever, and he was broken-hearted. Israel was his father, Naomi was his sister, and never again should he set his eyes on either. But in the pride of his perilous mission he bore himself bravely.

"Well, good night," he said, taking Naomi's hand, but not looking into her blind face.

"Good night," she answered, and then, after a moment, she flung her arms about his neck, and kissed him.

He laughed lightly, and turned to Israel.

"Good night, father," he said, in a shrill voice.

"A safe journey to you, my son," said Israel, "and may you do all my errands."

"God burn my great-grandfather if I do not," said Ali stoutly.

But with that word of his country his brave daring at length broke down, and drawing Israel aside, that Naomi might not hear, he whispered, sobbing and stammering, "*When—when I am gone, don't—don't tell her that I was black.*"

Then, in an instant, he fled away.

"In peace!" cried Israel after him; "in peace! my brave boy, simple, noble, loyal heart."

Comment seems impossible. All one can do is to read aloud, in a low and reverent tone, a passage like this from the pages of the *Westminster Review*:

'Mr. Hall Caine's novels afford evidence of a pronounced individuality of genius, which is calculated to count as a potent factor. Mr. Caine is essentially a romanticist. His romance is the romance of reality. *He combines moral sanity with imaginative fervour, truth of emotion with strength of passion, and thus succeeds in that combination of the familiar with the unfamiliar, that blending of the commonplace with the uncommon, which must ever remain the essence of romantic achievement.*'

Viewed in this light, what a gigantic *coup* is that phrase about the 'soft and playful lisp that ran in and out among the simple words that fell from her

red lips, like a young squirrel among the fallen leaves of autumn'!

Of one of Mr. Caine's novels, however, *The Deemster*, it is impossible for me to speak otherwise than with gratitude. I have not yet read it all, but I carry it about with me from place to place in this sunny, dusty, rainy, draughty, malodorous Riviera, where the exiled invalids of England dissipate their pessimistical winters. *The Deemster* broke up one of the most persistent attacks of insomnia that I have ever experienced. Through it I enjoyed night after night of sound and refreshing slumber. I let my stock of sulphonal tablets run out with a reckless unconcern. What did it matter? I had *The Deemster*. But this, I am aware, is a merely personal view of the matter, and we must mournfully admit that to our disinterested friend of Literature, and his species, there is no consolation possible for the literary existence of Mr. Hall Caine.

Yet even when one passes from this merely factitious and transitional branch of English fiction to the exiguous domain of better and more serious work, one is met too often with the barrenest results. The noisy popular success stands usually as an aching minus quantity, but the only less noisy half-success gives us again and again little more than zero. Sadly we perceive that it really amounts to

the same thing—to the same wearisome and obvious category of historical repetition. At the same time, no one who considers, side by side, the fiction of France and England, but must be struck with the fact that the waste of good average second-grade work is infinitely greater with us than with them. The French prose-writers of the lower line attain to results so incomparably more satisfactory than their English fellows. The reason is obvious: there need be no affectation of a search for it. The conditions under which the French writer works are in almost every respect more favourable. Firstly, he inherits the tradition of a genuine prose style. Matthew Arnold sneered at France as famed in all great arts but supreme in none; but does not prose count as a great art? Perhaps at the present moment there is none greater, and where shall we seek for prose to compare with that of France? At about the same period as the English poet was paraphrasing his own emaciate prose into his even more emaciate early sonnets, M. Renan was saying: ‘*La langue française est puritaine: on ne fait pas de conditions avec elle.*’ (‘The French language is Puritanic: you cannot inflict conditions upon it.’) Alas! in England the only thing that was *not* Puritanic was the English language, and it lay as helpless for any one to inflict conditions upon it in the nineteenth century as it

had done in the sixteenth. Shakespeare worked it to his will, at times with a divine success, at times with deplorable failure. Carlyle did the same, only that the failure was the rule and the success was the exception, and many smaller men have gone and done likewise, each in his own fashion. For our literature still more or less (and how much more than less!) remains in the condition described in the Book of Judges, and each man does that which is right in his own eyes. 'On est libre,' continued M. Renan, 'de ne pas l'écrire [la langue française]; mais dès qu'on entreprend cette tâche difficile, il faut passer les mains liées sous les fourches caudines du dictionnaire autorisé et de la grammaire que l'usage a consacrée.' ('You need not write it if you do not wish; but from the moment that you undertake this difficult task, it is necessary to pass with bound hands under the Caudine forks of the authorised vocabulary and of the grammar sanctioned by custom.') And this holds as good to-day, four decades later, as it did then, despite the scornful rejection of style by the extremists who gather round the dusty and tattered banner still held desperately aloft by M. Zola. Thus, then, do we start handicapped beside the third-rate, yea, and the tenth-rate, of our fellows in France. But this is only the first of their advantages. They have others all but as great and as precious. They have known

how to keep the Philistines and the Philistinesses in their place—the shopkeepers and the women! And what an unspeakable liberation lies there! To leave to all these good imbeciles their Hector Malots and their George Ohnets *et hoc genus omne*, and never to hear of them except in Gaza and Ascalon and Joppa and the other demesnes of Dagon, where no sensible person ever goes! No eternal babble from the housetops of Jerusalem about the high art of Mr. Caine, or the dialectic power of Mrs. Humphry Ward, or the wonderful plots of some other heaven-sent genius; no hopeless bewilderment of every young writer of ability by the ubiquitous bellowing of a criticism that is beneath contempt! Imagine what this would mean to us here in England!

Let us take two examples of our story-tellers of ability—prose-writers of the inferior class—men who, under the better circumstances of a more critical audience, would have in all probability achieved something complete and durable. At the present moment ‘everybody’ is reading either *The Little Minister* or *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Mr. Hardy has been before the public for a not inconsiderable period, and has doubtless reached the weary stage of a hopeless fatality in such matters; but Mr. Barrie is still young at the work, and it is not pleasant to think that he has yet given us his best. For it is at

once to be admitted that in *A Window in Thrums* he not only broke new ground, but wrote a book portions of which can fitly be considered as literature. Of the twenty-two episodes, each in its particular chapter, which compose this picture of a township of poverty-stricken Scotch weavers, quite half are done excellently; one or two are little masterpieces. There is nothing great about his way of doing it. The secret of showing the reflection of the stars in the puddles, in Dostoieffsky's fine phrase, is hidden from him. The moment he tries to bring in Nature, the parent of the vast inanimate forces which, whether we know it or not, influence us all so profoundly in our moods, our humours, our very temperaments, he fails completely. If Pierre Loti gives us a picture of the Breton fisher-folk, he makes us feel and understand how they are all as much the growth of the place, the climate, the seasons, as the animals and birds, the flowers and grasses. All this escapes Mr. Barrie. He has only seen, and can only render, what is directly obvious to the myopic gaze of everyday love. He gives all the soulless pettiness, the ravenous snobbery, of these poor people. He gives also their sombre, inarticulate passions of affection and endurance, but nothing more. They remain isolated, baseless, suspended in mid-air, so to say. To him, men and women are merely 'pilgrims



and strangers' of the earth—not children, not organic products of it. His limitations, therefore, are severe, but their very severity gives him at his best a pungent force that enables us to see with our proper eyes some of his men and women, not, indeed, as they really are, but as they appear to him, and, in a manner, to themselves. Jess and Hendry, Jamie and Leeby—these actually live for him, and he has succeeded in making them live for us. Some of the others are failures. Haggart, the humourist, for example, is a dreadful failure. He ends with becoming intolerable, not because humourists are not frequently intolerable (and especially Scotch humourists), but because Mr. Barrie has not in the least succeeded in realising the character he would fain portray. The three chapters assigned to this conventional puppet are utterly below the level of the others in every way. So far for his first book. After the *Window in Thrums*, with such admirable work in it in different styles as 'Dead this Twenty Years' (chapter vi.), 'A Cloak with Beads' (chapter viii.), and 'Leeby and Jamie' (chapter xviii.), which gave something very like a harmonious totality of impression, Mr. Barrie, like the rest of them, was apparently smitten with 'the last infirmity of noble mind,' as that infirmity takes shape before the lower type of literary purveyor, and decided to write a full-blown

novel. *The Little Minister* is that full-blown novel, and it is an effort over which any true friend of Mr. Barrie's should weep. What a perfect, what a grotesque mishap it is! The book is an irremediable failure because it is utterly wrong as a whole. What a mere circus caricature is the central personage, that inhuman 'Egyptian woman'! Has Mr. Barrie indeed never read *Carmen*? Or did it happen that, in some dripping and dingy Scotch town, a be-draggled company of strolling singers played some mournful malversion of the opera of Louis Bizet? And was Mr. Barrie there, and did it strike him that he could take the glancing figure of the Spanish gipsy girl and put her to better local use with an Auld Licht ministerial prig and a mass of local colour? Surely he could not have read Prosper Mérimée's novel and dared to exploit, and ruin in the exploitation, its delicious heroine? The book is absurd because its main feature is absurd. All that it contains of any value whatever is to be found in the touches of the Thrums life in the style of the *Window*. To all appearance Mr. Barrie's vein of ore is a thin one—a very thin one; and can he congratulate himself on the compensating fact that it is passably pure?

His next volume will probably be the decisive one of his work. No one would wish to limit its scope.

If he can fill a larger canvas, a more animated scene, than the *Window*, then he should do it; but let him pause and realise critically what such a departure means. Is he properly equipped for it? He cannot afford—no writer can afford—to be in the dark about himself to the extent he was, and probably is, concerning the *Minister*. Ah, if only he could be forbidden to write anything more for several years, and set upon a course of study of the best modern French fiction! He might learn his limitations. He might even learn to make the failures of his past the successes of his future. What a revelation such a book as the *Pêcheur d'Islande* should be to any one who wished to handle such a subject as that of which Mr. Barrie had an exiguous conception in the *Minister*! What an explanation of his own catastrophe! what a course of instruction as to the true lines on which the last infirmity of noble mind should lead (if lead it must) the author of *A Window in Thrums*!

It is quite different with Mr. Hardy and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. The central conception of the book, the main feature, seems right enough, but it has not been seized strongly, and the story, like all Mr. Hardy's stories, alternately hurries or flags. Parts are good enough as renderings of human and natural life to make one more than astonished at the

not unfrequent lapses into the cheapest conventional style of the average popular novelist. What can one make of a piece of writing like this, where the most flagrant puppets for the time-being usurp the parts of what he has taught us to feel as something like human characters?

(The Durbeyfield family is discussing a recent visit of Mr. D'Urberville.)

'Her mother hastened to explain, smiles breaking from every inch of her person. . . .

"Mr. D'Urberville says you must be a good girl, if you are at all as you appear; he knows you must be worth your weight in gold. He is very much interested in 'ee—truth to tell." . . .

"It is very good of him to think that," she murmured; "and if I was quite sure how it would be living there, I would go in a moment."

"He is a mighty handsome man!"

"I don't think so," said Tess coldly.

"Well, there's your chance, whether or no; and I'm sure he wears a beautiful diamond ring."

"Yes," said little Abraham brightly, from the window-bench; "and I seed it! And it did twinkle when he put his hand up to his mistarshers. *Mother, why did our noble relation keep on putting his hand up to his mistarshers?*"

And so on, in the same vile and detestable fashion.

But his dramatic aberrations lead him into blunders more serious still. To say nothing of the improbability of four milkmaids, all sleeping in one room, and all hopelessly in love with one blameless prig of an amateur gentleman farmer, what a shocking want

of the sense of both humour and variety does he show in creating such a situation! It is scarcely to be wondered at that these imaginary dairymaids soon begin to talk as never dairymaids talked on earth. One of them has caught another kissing the shade of the prig's mouth against the wall, and as the three are standing that night 'in a group, in their night-gowns, bare-footed at the window,' amorously regarding the beloved one below, Miss Retty Priddle candidly states the fact.

'A rosy spot came into the middle of Izz Huett's cheek.

"Well, there's no harm in it," she declared, with attempted coolness. "And if I be in love with him, so is Retty too; and so be you, Marian, come to that."

'Marian's full face could not blush past its chronic pinkness.

"I?" she said; "what a tale! Ah, there he is again! Dear eyes—dear face—dear Mr. Clare!"

"There—you've owned it!"

"So have you—so have we all," said Marian. . . . "I would just marry him to-morrow."

"So would I—and more," murmured Izz Huett.

"And I too," whispered the more timid Retty.'

'At this,' observes Mr. Hardy, ingenuously, 'the listener [Miss Tess Durbeyfield] grew warm'; and although she is also in her night-gown, though not at the window, it is no wonder.

"We can't all marry him," said Izz.

"We shan't, either of us; which is worse still," said the eldest. "There he is again!"

'And all three blew him a silent kiss.'

Nothing more fatuous than this has been done by any writer of anything approaching ability in our time, and it is as false in characterisation as it is absurd in conception. Even Mr. Hall Caine rarely sinks lower. The same weakness drives Mr. Hardy to mar the evanescent reality of Tess herself. He will make her talk sometimes as the author of *Far from the Madding Crowd* or *The Woodlanders* is often wont to write. Her lover presses upon her a course of study in history; but she refuses.

‘Because what’s the use of learning that I am one of a long row only—finding out that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall only act her part? making me sad, that’s all. The best is not to remember that your nature and your past doings have been just like thousands and thousands, and that your coming life and doings’ll be like thousands and thousands. . . . I shouldn’t mind learning why the sun shines on the just and the unjust alike, but that is what books will not tell me.’

Tess, it is true, as Mr. Hardy continually remarks, had passed her sixth standard; but even agricultural girls of the sixth standard are scarcely yet credible with a ‘criticism of life’ of this calibre. It is terrible to see a story-teller so unaware of what constitutes the one possible charm of his chief figure. Imagine Goethe making Marguerite talk like that! And it is not that Mr. Hardy is not at times able to render character. D’Urberville, for instance, in the first

two parts is recognisably drawn from the life; but that does not prevent a shadowy masquerade of this vicious brute appearing for a short period later on as a ranting preacher. It is not that vicious brutes may not become ranting preachers—they may, and do; but that this particular vicious brute of Mr. Hardy's, thanks to the want of energy in his realisation, does nothing of the kind.

One artistic gift Mr. Hardy has which rarely seems to desert him, and that is what Henri Beyle calls so aptly *l'originalité de lieu*. His people are at one with his places, a single harmonious growth of spiritual and natural circumstance; and this, the true artistic 'charity,' covers, or helps to cover, a multitude of sins. Here it is permitted us to praise him fully and almost unreservedly. The best examples of his landscape reach high—indeed, as high as anything of the kind now done among us. Let us even go further, and say that no one has rendered certain aspects of English scenery with such soft, clear perfection of touch as he has—that no one has produced anything approaching it for years. What else but this extraordinary gift renders credible and even poignantly real the final wanderings of the two lovers world-weary and doomed? (The murder, of course, like most of his would-be dramatic work, is absurd.) The love-nest in the empty, furnished

home of strangers, an incident superficially so improbable, is made only less actual than the weird journey to Stonehenge, and Tess's sacrificial sleep on the altar-stone. After all, the book has in it the sob of the earth's suffering, 'the sense of tears in mortal things,' the vain struggle of the human heart against unjust fatality; and of how many books, not to say of how many novels, that appear in this England in a generation can one say so much?—in this England where the novel has become the helpless prey of the Philistine and the Philistiness—where the only variation possible on the banalities of an ignorant and abject conventionality seems to be fantastic revels in the English tongue, and the literary woe and abomination alluded to by more than one of the prophets.

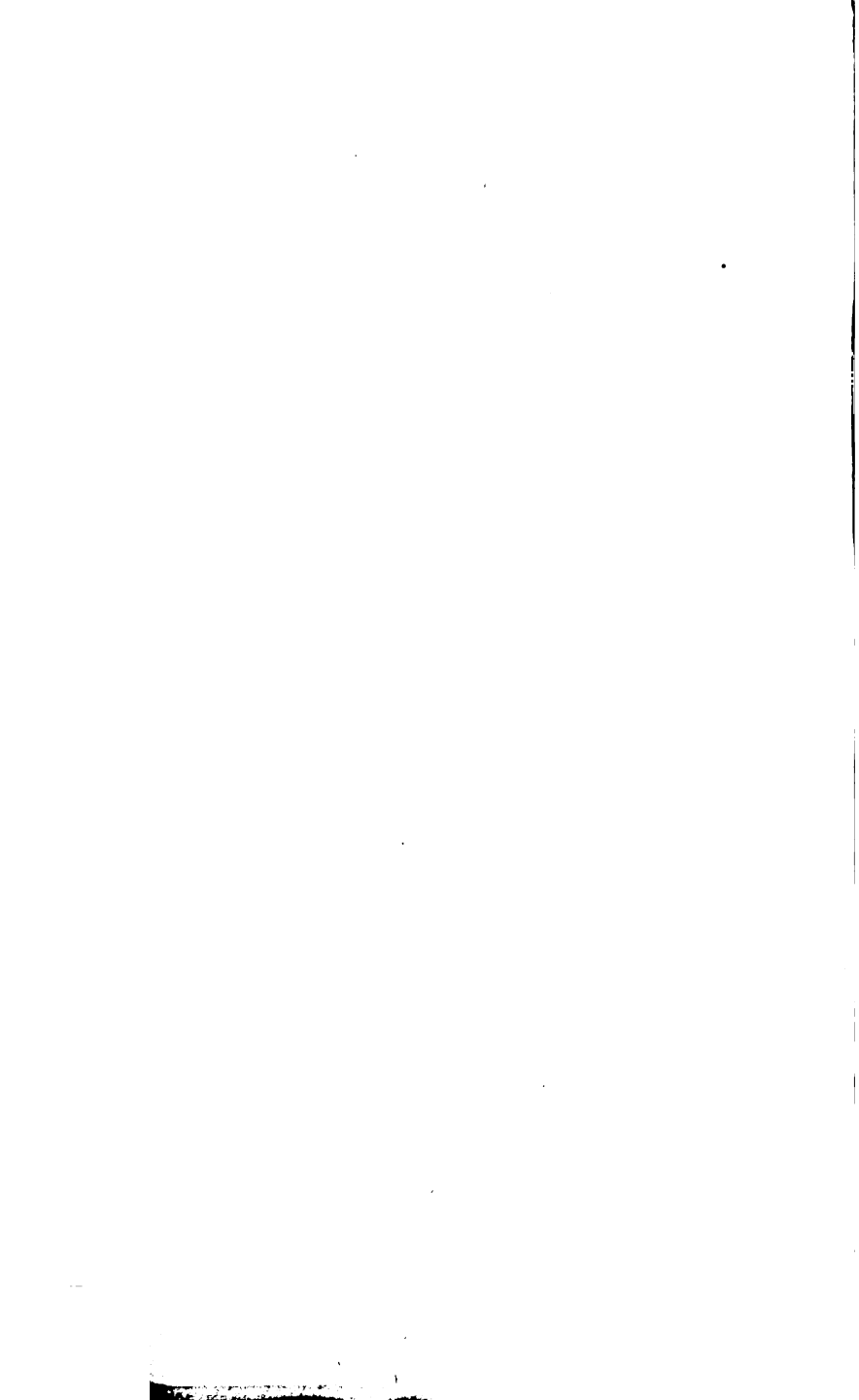
Yet one cannot for a moment hesitate in one's recognition of the fact that Mr. Hardy's novel is not a success—is a failure. It is too faulty to pass. The gaps that represent bad work are too large and too frequent. One has no desire to come back to it. A second reading leaves a lower estimate of it than the first, and a third is not possible. There is the immense pity of it! The artistic blemishes which were in Mr. Hardy's early books might, and in all probability would, have been eradicated if from the beginning he had had to face anything like



genuine criticism, anything like a genuinely critical public. But, as it was, he was praised for his bad work and blamed for his good, until the faculty of distinction in him became hopelessly blurred and bewildered. The grotesque worthlessness of the criticism which he, like all the rest of us, received and receives in the ravenous and whirling columns of the Press, he must soon have learned to rate at its true value for a serious writer. But the critical effort (and that comes to mean the effort in what may be called comparative culture) which still alone can prove the salvation of such an one among ourselves, this, alas, he has not made. The result is that his most ambitious work—work which should have proved a masterpiece and which contains the elements of a masterpiece—has absolutely missed its aim and falls away. ‘This sort cometh not out save by prayer and fasting.’

Yes, truly there are moments in which one does not realise how supremely rare anything really admirable is. At such moments one is prone to regret that the man who had painted a pig perfectly had not expended his energy on the painting of a man, as if perfectly painted pigs were so common! Why, it is just the reverse, and the producer of such is not to be worried by our bootless desires that he should be something else than what he is. Many

are called, few are chosen, and, like Peter, we must not dub common or unclean any really fine sample of anything that *lives*. Art also is justified of all her children, and if only one can produce something which proves one's parentage, there is no more to say. For the masterpieces, of each and every size and description, alone of human things baffle for any space the vain shadow in which we walk and disquiet ourselves in vain, seeing that they confer something which is a permanent pleasure and enrichment of our lives.



SHELLEY



## SHELLEY

It says something for, at least, the vitality of Shelley that he is the only personage of his time over whom intelligent and candid men still see fit to lose their tempers. He was born a hundred years ago this 4th of August 1892, and he has been dead just seventy years this 8th of July, and Shelleyans and Anti-Shelleyans are standing at this hour with hostile faces over against one another, both prepared to talk vehement nonsense on the slightest provocation. No such phenomenon is to be seen with regard to his contemporaries—to Wordsworth or Coleridge, to Keats or even Byron. They are accepted now or denied, intelligently or stupidly; but the denial and the acceptance are both more or less moderate: they arouse no passions. In the case of Shelley, it is true, the claims advanced are irreconcilable with the accusations levelled. The one asks all; the others not only will give nothing, but even go so far as to allege an aching minus quantity. Shelley is a great man; Shelley is an inspired imbecile. Shelley is a modern Christ; Shelley is a wretch.

And lastly, there is the amiably silly effort after reconciliation which takes the shape of 'poor dear Shelley.'

All this is very strange to the new generation. Why this disquietude about Shelley? He is no more to us than any one else. We want to get out of him just what there is to be got; nothing more, nothing less. We have no interest in making him seem other than he is. We do not want to assault him; he does not block the way. We do not want to worship him; he does not appeal to us sufficiently. Why, then, should we take sides over his love affairs with Harriet Westbrook and Mary Godwin? Both the girls were quite uninteresting and unimportant in themselves. All they showed was Shelley's capacity for making a fool of himself over women. But nobody now comes to blows over Byron's separation from his wife, because everybody sees that it was the very best thing that could have happened to him. We take the affair merely as a factor in the formation of his life and character. Why cannot we do the same with Shelley?

This necessity for swallowing or rejecting people in the bulk is a survival of a period totally uncritical, and we should protest against it. The greatest men have the most grave limitations. They have the limitations of their time, the limitations of their

temperaments. How can it be otherwise? There is room for plenty of destructive criticism on them all, before we have passed through the empty thunder and spectacular lightning, and can hear 'the still small voice' that is the clear and eternal note of the Godhead. Since we speak of Shelley, let us speak of him with absolute simplicity and candour. He can afford to be spoken of in that way; indeed, no other way is worth the attempting, and surely, if he were alive and one of us, he himself would be the first to agree to this.

It is absurd to claim for him any great practical abilities. His ignorance of life and living was extreme. His personal relations make up one long list of grotesque misconceptions. He was, in the obvious sense of the word, a visionary, and his violent antagonisms were far more caused by his disgust with the contact of reality than by any genuine appreciation of the relative values of good and evil. He made no sane and conscious effort to understand things. He did not know how to strike injustice in its weakest part, or how best to help on the downtrodden. He wasted three-fourths of his energy on side-issues. He was always taking seriously the wrong people and the wrong ideas. He held Harriet Westbrook for a victim of social oppression, whereas she was merely the average



pretty girl in search of 'bread-and-cheese and kisses.' He accepted Mary Godwin as a sort of female seraph, and this essentially vulgar-souled, small-minded, sentimental *poseuse* exploited him fifty times more ruthlessly than the poor little Methodist. This did not in the least prevent him from a still wilder, if only momentary, aberration over the lovely nullity of Emilia Viviani, the attitudinising Italian girl from whom he was inveigled by the envious Mary, resolute to retain the monopoly of exploitation which she had won by the ruin of a better woman than herself. Intellectually or sexually—it makes little difference which—Shelley was the born child of illusion. To the very last he looked upon Godwin—Godwin, the most sordid of mediocrities—as a great thinker, and his conception of Byron as a supreme artist is one of the gems of criticism. Shelley's true brother is Blake, the inspired Cockney. For both were visionaries and little else. Blake remained one to the close of a long career. Shelley died at thirty, having just discovered in Jane Williams, the wife of a friend of his and another ordinary good-looking Englishwoman (with a baby), a final incarnation of 'the woman's soul,' which (*teste* Goethe, of all men in the world) 'draws us upwards.'

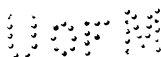
It is when one comes to compare the visionary of this limited calibre with the visionary on the

higher plane that one realises how, and why, the claims made in behalf of the personal greatness of the Shelleys or the Blakes are so untenable. Jeanne d'Arc was a visionary, but that did not in the least prevent her from being a shrewd and sensible young woman, wonderfully in touch with the actualities of things. *She* knew what life and living meant, which is to say that she knew what men and women were like, and this was why she was able not only to achieve so much herself, but also to remain one of the perpetually inspiring figures of history. Shelley achieved little or nothing, even in his own small circle, and his personal blunders were the cause of catastrophe after catastrophe. Once and once only do we see him at his truest, at his best, and that is in the charming pages of Trelawny's *Records*, where we have him alone. Left to himself, or to the society of the one or two who understood him, he lived the free life of the happy, melodious, childlike dreamer who is master of his dreams. The moment he came into contact with the more or less everyday man or woman, the trouble began. He had a most liberal supply of good intentions, of course. As Keats sardonically observed of him, he had 'his quota of good qualities.' But he never saw any one or any thing as they really were, and all the while he piqued himself on a deeper and

intenser comprehension of them, shoving them on to the rack of his imaginary conceptions, and vehemently essaying to stretch them out to ideal proportions. When they shouted and struggled, he was indignant, or, in the hour of subsequent dejection, confessed with a sorrowful ingenuousness that his 'passion for reforming the world' did not somehow seem to work well. In darker hours still he craved for the final peace of extinction. Wilder 'passions for reforming the world' than ever Shelley had have reformed the world more than once, but they have done so because they were allied to a profound sense of the nature of men and women, of the meaning of life and living. Zoroaster, Gautama, Jesus, Mohammed—the list can be enlarged at will.

Shelley died, we have noted, only seventy years ago, and already the symbolism which he used in his attempted 'criticism of life' is effete. It was, as it were, so largely journalism, so little literature; so largely mistaken and superficial subjects, so little a powerful utilisation of the permanent materials of life. To put it shortly, he was passably wanting in brains, and he did not make up for it by any great force of intuition. And then he did not in his heart really care much about what are optimistically termed his 'ideas.' His revolutionary enthusiasm never went very deep. Of course he thought it did. For his

sensitiveness was acute, and whatever breeze blew on the wires produced music. If these ideas had been a dominant passion in him, he would have found the patience and strength requisite for something like a real apprehension of the social problem. He would have illuminated it at least partially, and he has illuminated it in no wise. Nothing he said of it is of any importance ; little of any interest. His sole contribution here is his complete fearlessness, the fearlessness of the dream-drugged fanatic who believes he cannot be killed by infidel bullets. 'Give us the truth, whatever it is,' he exclaims once, and it is usual to call this sort of thing the passion for truth. But it is not : it is the passion of the intoxication of courage. No one can deny Shelley courage. He would go anywhere, and face anything. You had only to persuade him that some of those horrid people who defiled and destroyed his dreams were in front of him, and he was ready to risk his life in trying to get at them ; and nothing was easier than to persuade him. A little laudanum would do it ; a little spiteful talk would do it. He was at the mercy of every fool or knave, male or female—and especially female. There was no calculating on him, and the worst feature of all in him was that he was always sincere, always in earnest. Some such character, perchance, was John, the beloved disciple,



also called Boanerges; and in the hands of a Master whose wisdom and tact were consummate, John doubtless did peerless service. Shelley was unlucky enough never to meet a master. Those he took for such were men like Godwin, and, in a measure, Byron—the one a vagabond charlatan, the other a mere superb *Hau-Degen*, as the Germans say, a glorified swashbuckler on the right side. Shelley was forced to stand by himself, forced to attempt all alone the feat of ‘scaling the Alps,’ in the picturesque phrase of Carlyle, who opined that the would-be climber’s general existence must have been ‘haggard.’ Carlyle was mistaken. Sometimes it was, but often it was not, and sometimes it was happy beyond words. Shelley, in his Italian woods, on his Italian rivers and shores, is the one revelation of pure, unconscious, lyric happiness granted us from the life of his contemporaries.

As in every case, his strength and his weakness went hand in hand. That acute sensitiveness of his made him susceptible to the whisper of ‘the prophetic soul of the wide world dreaming on things to come’ to an extent that was remarkable for its discoveries and its errors. Wordsworth, in his heavy way, Coleridge, in his effusive way, had been excited in their youth by the ‘bliss’ of the revolutionary dawn in France. Wordsworth was hopelessly doomed

to respectability from the start, and Coleridge was too cowardly and faithless to accept deeds of blood. Besides, their real cares lay elsewhere—Wordsworth in his ‘pedlar poems’ and the appalling edifice of his teleological orthodoxy; Coleridge in his criticism, in his golden lyrics, in the philosophic balloons, the sending off of which diverted his last years of collapse. Keats, like Gallio, cared for none of these things. Byron, on the other hand, knew thoroughly well how badly beaten was the cause of liberty and progress. He knew what the Tory Government of England meant; what the Holy Alliance Government of Europe meant. Circumstances drove him into the opposition, and the old berserker fury came upon him. He fought for the sake of fighting, to ease his heart and mind, and he felt vaguely that in the long-run the stupid and corrupt conquerors must be beaten; but that was all. It would never be in his time. Waterloo had settled all that. Shelley, in his complete ignorance of the conditions of the struggle, thought that things might recommence at any moment. Therefore he sang with a divine optimism of revolts in the clouds, utterly undisturbed in his conviction of the approaching triumph of the ideas which he found interesting and animating. ‘The necessity of Atheism’—the necessity of incest—the necessity of a vegetable diet,—everything was a

'necessity' which happened at the moment to have hold of him. Then, when things did not commence nor show the slightest sign of commencing, he fell into the blackest pessimism, and only roused himself from it to indulge in versified fairy-tales, where he could manipulate everything according to his fantasy. He was right and he was wrong, therefore: nearer the truth than Wordsworth and Coleridge, further away than Byron and (on his own special side) than Keats. It was the same with his efforts after a social circle. Matthew Arnold has drawn a justly derisive picture of Shelley's associates ('What a set! what a life!' and so on), but concludes with making one of his unctuous personal appeals to Cardinal Newman as a witness in favour of better things elsewhere. This is that Cardinal Newman of whom Carlyle remarked that he had 'no more brains than a rabbit'; and it is unlikely that Carlyle would have contented himself with even such criticism of the members of Newman's 'set.' Shelley's 'set' may have been this or that, and his 'life' may have been that or this, but at least he continually sought for a society that had in it a stream of ideas, that had an outlook on to the future, that could animate and sustain his creative and critical faculties; and he would have found nothing of the sort with the Wordsworths or the Southey's or the Coleridges, any more than years later with

the pitiful company of the Puseys and Newmans and Kebles. He found Byron, however, who, with all his dreadful limitations, was the one great man then alive in England; and he appreciated all that was best, not only in Wordsworth and Coleridge, but also in Keats. No other man of his time had a taste so catholic. He could not help feeling whatever was new and true. None of the others, except Keats, had a tithe of his receptivity, a tithe of his sincerity. Keats advised him to 'curb his magnanimity and become more of an artist,' and the advice was the best he could have had. Goethe could not have diagnosed his case more infallibly, or have prescribed a more certain cure for his disease. But Shelley, like the rest of us, could only be what he was, the circumstances being unhappy. What he might have become it is impossible to say and idle to speculate. Our sole concern is with what he was.

Towards the close he showed signs of a sounder power of estimation; but what did it amount to? He was going off on the tack of the scholarly recluse, complicated by the old wild outbursts, and who is more ignorant of life than the scholar, and especially the sensitive scholar? He was so easily drawn into adventures of a sort that was fatal to him. The Gambas and Emilia Viviani—Williams and Mrs. Williams—revolutionary skirmishes and rapt Platonics



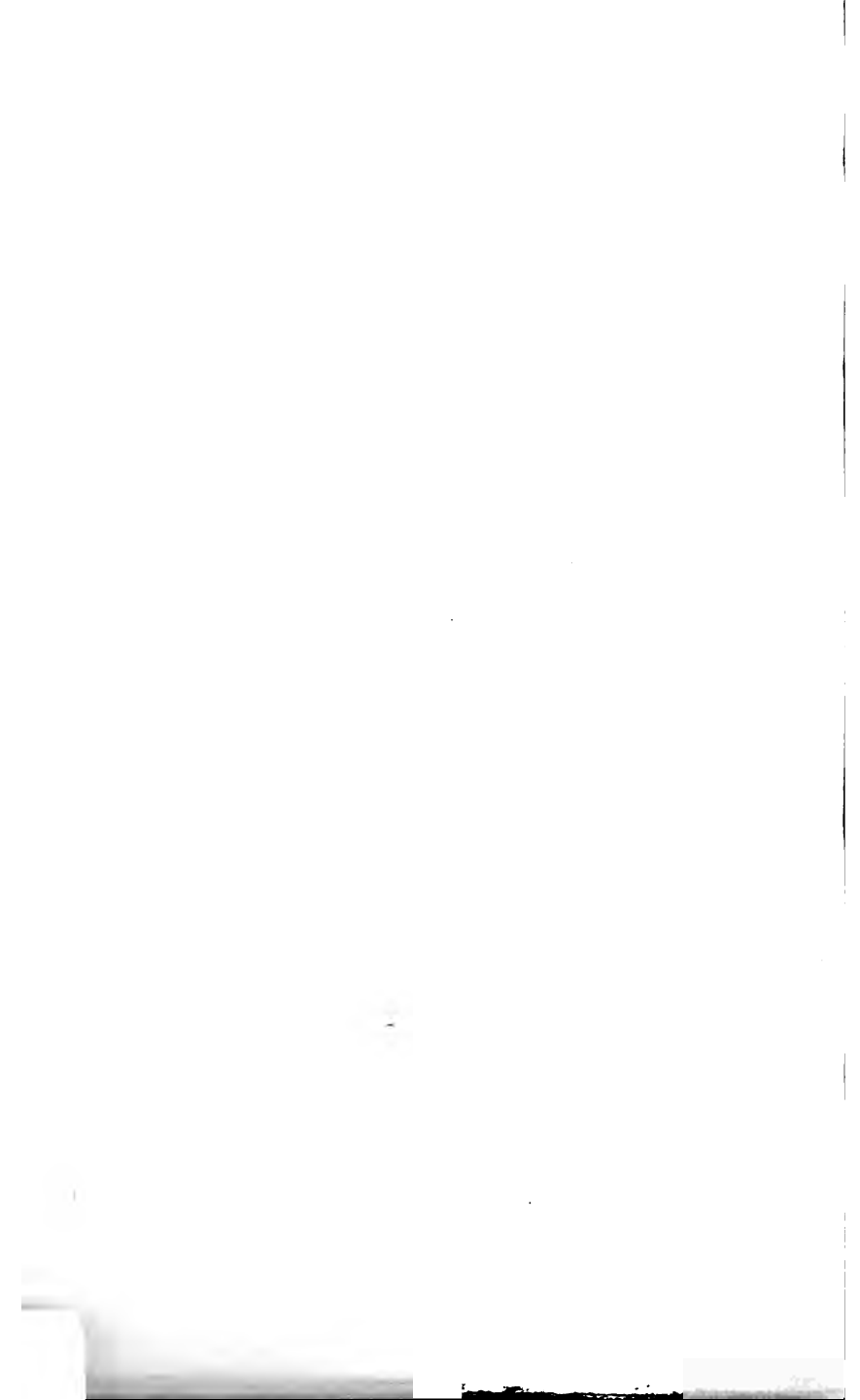
—Mediterranean yachting and his neighbour's wife ; it was all of a piece. He knew no more about managing a boat than he did about managing himself or other people, and the last of his catastrophes settled the business for ever. And yet he had a distinct faculty for coming back on himself, and, though his turning his experiences of all sorts to artistic use was only an unconscious instinct, still the instinct certainly existed. But he could not curb his magnanimity ; he could not become more of an artist. When he had exploited his emotions it was always to find that they had also exploited him, and he turned away at once with a shudder from his expression of them as from 'a part of him already dead.' There lies the essential insincerity of his sincerity. Only an inspired amateur could have fooled himself every time in the way Shelley did, and found nothing but an empty husk for after-use.

Byron's glory is this : that at the darkest hour which the cause of liberty and progress has known in the century, when the furtherance of that cause was utterly hopeless in the domain of action, he asserted it with irresistible power in the domain of literature. The sword was shattered : Byron seized the pen. Defeat and disaster were everywhere : he rallied the scattered ranks, and, in a mad assault on the conquerors, checked their ruthless pursuit and

saved the future. And he did this not for one country or another, but for all Europe. What France owed and owes him she can never repay. He lifted her from the dust. Italy's debt to him is, if possible, a greater one. But why should one specialise? Civilisation must refuse to forget the honour due to the man who, at the crisis of life and death, imperiously declared for life, and struggle, and the claim of victory. Shelley at this crisis did nothing—could do nothing. He had no readers, no public. Byron was an English lord, an English aristocrat, and the start this gave him in the race was then enormous. Europe, lying under the feet of English Toryism and the Holy Alliance, suddenly saw an English noble strike blow after blow at its oppressors. Even Wellington, the sacred peace-monger of the world, was not safe. Byron bemocked his nose! The death of an English king was celebrated by an English Laureate in incredibly fulsome style, and no one dared open lips to ridicule or reject. History will yet have to tell us what it meant at such a moment as this to see that Laureate swept away in a fiery torrent of wit and mockery and scorn. Nothing can get over the fact that Byron, at the direst time of need, did the actual work—and a tremendous piece of work it was—which threw back the advancing tide of tyranny and kept our hope



**MR. RUDYARD KIPLING'S VERSE**



## MR. RUDYARD KIPLING'S VERSE

THE actual work of Mr. Rudyard Kipling as a writer of verse divides itself in the most obvious way into two parts—his first book of verse and his second book of verse, *Departmental Ditties* and *Barrack-Room Ballads*. Further developments in this work are possible, and even probable, but at present it surely suffices, for the inevitably partial purposes of contemporary criticism, that these two books mark, and mark clearly, two distinct ages of effort and achievement.

### I

#### 'DEPARTMENTAL DITTIES AND OTHER VERSES'

Mr. Kipling seems to have small belief in what the old-fashioned authors used to call the intelligent reader. At any rate, he would seem to consider that either an explanatory 'prelude' or 'envoi,' or occasionally both, are desirable adjuncts to every book. Sometimes his prelude will be an unmistakable finger-post, inscribed legibly for the perusal of all. Then, if he indulges in an *envoi*, we shall find him speaking

with intense and personal passion to the esoteric alone, or else veiling himself even from them in a vague mysteriousness of allusion. He is well within his rights, of course, in all these things—as well within his rights as are his critics within theirs when they frankly accept his revelations of his own individual existence as an appreciable element in the production of his work.

In the *Departmental Ditties*, his self-explanations take the shape of a preliminary finger-post for public inspection, and of a final communication, airily inscribed, 'To whom it may concern,' but so discreetly worded withal that it is fair to raise against it the accusation of a somewhat unwarranted obscurity. When he published his first short volume of stories, *Soldiers Three*, he wrote for it an *envoi* that disclosed unexpected depths of feeling. It was evident that he took his work very seriously. He spoke of the obscure agony of its production, there in the town of his banishment—

'Where with the shifting dust I play,  
And eat the bread of Discontent.'

He spoke of his sense of having achieved the power of creation over his *dramatis personæ*, these 'rude figures of a rough-hewn race.' He spoke of his certainty of the praise of 'the long *bazar*,' and lastly

he spoke of his final doubt of having in reality 'done well.' This temper is admirable, but it is not always that one can indulge in it. As an introduction to these 'ditties,' wherein at least he still faces the foot-lights of his well-beloved Anglo-India, he declares :

'I have written the tale of our life  
For a sheltered people's mirth,  
In jesting guise—but ye are wise,  
And ye know what the jest is worth.'

It is a feast of patter-songs, dispensed to the twang of the banjo in the bibulous atmosphere of the post-prandial smoke-concert, that he presents to us here. Rarely shall we listen to chords struck in the minor key. More rarely still to the stirring vibrations of the march movement. Yet he cannot rise from his chair and retire without telling us—as it were, casually, quietly, and with shy, downward glances—that there are other instruments of the Muses besides the banjo on which he can, and will, he trusts, yet perform for us. Therefore (though not for the world would he have us derange our ease), 'to whom it may concern' be it known that he is well aware that the smoke is dying upon the altar, that the flowers are decaying, and that the goddess has flown away. None the less, here, in this his town of banishment, where the amusement is rather too suggestive of man's latter end, and the diet is strictly limited, we still continue



to pile up the sacrifice on the stone, whereon fresh wreaths are laid.

‘For, it may be, if still we sing,  
And tend the Shrine,  
Some Deity on wandering wing  
May there incline ;  
And, finding all in order meet,  
Stay while we worship at her feet.’

The temper, then, in which we are called to view the *Departmental Ditties* is made quite clear by their author. But he goes even further, and, in a ‘general summary,’ gives us the very text of his jesting discourses. ‘The artless songs I sing,’ he remarks,

‘Do not deal with anything  
New or never said before.  
As it was in the beginning,  
Is to-day official sinning,  
And shall be for evermore.’

And *vers de société* on Anglo-Indian ‘official sinning,’ in the hands of Mr. Kipling, mean for the most part, as was to be expected, more or less discreet variations on the ever-fertile subject of adultery. At the same time, in the forty-nine poems which make up the book, it is gratifying to note that this subject does not hold quite the same proportion that it did in the volume of tales wherein he ‘illustrated’ the ‘social feature,’ and gave five ‘illustrations’ (it may

be remembered) out of six to the professional impugnors of the Seventh Commandment.

Over a third of these poems are good of their kind, light, bright, and readable, but there are only too many which fall to the lugubrious level of the popular 'funny' verse of the hour—stuff like nine out of ten of the *Bab Ballads* and 'comic annuals,'—the source, doubtless, of much innocent pleasure to the domesticated commercial clerk, and the suburban young ladies who have lived and loved; but not alarmingly interesting to any one else. No original note is struck. Indeed, it would be a marvel if there were—as great a marvel as if a new form of barrel-organ suddenly discoursed a new form of music to us in the jaded fever of the London streets. No form of writing—no, not the Three-Volume Novel itself—has been more exploited than the Occasional Verse. It is hackneyed beyond redemption. Not even continuous efforts after local colour and the obstinate use of technical terms can get Mr. Kipling out of the vicious circle. A paraphrase of Poe ('The Raven' for choice) is inevitable under such circumstances, and here we have it at full length. So is a paraphrase of Browning's blank verse, when Mr. Kipling wants to try his hand at what he takes to be poetical characterisation; and Tennyson, and models even more hapless, will be requisitioned for efforts at the narrative idyllic.

The obligations to Poe are not only obvious but conscious, but there is no sign in the other cases of anything more than the former quality. They seem rather to be samples of that dreadful and slovenly receptivity which is the curse of the clever journalist in every department of his work. Thus does Lord Dufferin address Lord Lansdowne :

'So here's your Empire. No more mine then? Good.  
We'll clear the Aides and *khitmatgars* away.  
(You'll know that fat old fellow with the knife—  
He keeps the Name Book, talks in English, too,  
And almost thinks himself the Government.)  
O Truth, Truth, Truth ! Forgive me, you're so young.'

And so on. Then a turn of Tennyson :

'Imprimis he was "broke." Thereafter left  
His reg-i-ment and, later, took to drink ;  
Then, having lost the bal-ance *of* his friends,  
"Went Fantee"—joined the people *of* the land,  
Turned three parts Mus-salman and one Hindu,  
And lived among the Gauri vill-a-gers.'

And so on again. Trying, however, as is a second-rate literary mannerism at second-hand, done in one's salad days, it is as nothing compared to the solemn repetition of the same offence in a worse form in the hour of one's golden prime. There may be nothing more tiresome in any of Browning's galvanised monologues, and nothing more vapid in any of Lord Tennyson's pseudo-idyls, than these two detestable

paraphrases; but then *Departmental Ditties* is a small matter even to their author, and it would indeed be a waste of shot to demolish them in detail even to this extent. But the remarkable thing is that in the *Barrack-Room Ballads* we shall meet paraphrases, if possible, even more detestable still. There Mr. Kipling actually goes back on himself to produce verse of this sort in a piece called 'Evarra and his Gods':

'Because the city gave him *of* her gold,  
Because the caravans brought turquoises,  
Because his life was sheltered *by* the King,  
So *that* no man should maim him, none should steal,  
Or break his rest with babble *in* the streets  
When he was weary after toil, he made  
An image *of* his God in gold and pearl,'

and so on. It is, I know, a harsh and severe thing to say, but none the less it is certainly true that not even Sir Edwin Arnold ever wrote viler blank verse than that. Nor does this singular example of critical incapacity on the part of our balladist stand alone. Here is the opening of another piece, 'The Sacrifice of Er-Heb,' also one of Mr. Kipling's latest efforts:

'Er-Heb beyond the Hills of Ao-Safai  
Bears witness to the truth, and Ao-Safai  
Hath told the men of Gorukh. Thence the tale  
Comes westward o'er the peaks of In-di-a.'

We shall find no conscious and critical development

in this man. He begins as a journalist of genius, and as a journalist of genius he seems fated to end. 'Culture' stands to the author of *Life's Handicap* as it did to the author of *Soldiers Three*, merely as 'cul-chaw.' In *Barrack-Room Ballads* we shall learn that 'art' is a mere barren device of the sardonic Satan, which is, at any rate, some change on *Departmental Ditties*, where we shall not find it at all. And as a practical comment on this, we have a regular tiara of gems like

'Thence the tale  
Comes westward o'er the peaks of In-di-a'!

It was the same with his fiction. 'Krishna Mulvaney' heads the list of his last volume, and the 'Lang Men o' Larut' turns up naked and unashamed among its wedding guests. On this occasion the matter is one chiefly of technique. But technique, we know, is something more, far more, than a trick of hand, and in other cases we can be sure that we shall find the crying want of it manifesting itself in a writer's essential qualities of spirit and intellect.

Over a third of these ditties are good of their kind, light, bright, and readable, the verse which in the hours of our teased weariness of work it is pleasant and sometimes not altogether unprofitable to have at hand. One sample will suffice—a sample of the

MR. RUDYARD KIPLING'S VERSE 195

better sort—the 'Legend of the Foreign Office,' which explains why Rustum Beg, the Rajah of Kolazai, loves 'simpkin' (*Anglicè*, champagne) and brandy, squanders his revenues, and vexes a Government which is tender and kind, and 'also—but this is a detail—blind.'

'Rustum Beg of Kolazai—slightly backward native state—  
Lusted for a C.S.I.—so began to sanitize.  
Built a Gaol and Hospital—nearly built a city drain—  
Till his faithful subjects all thought their ruler was insane.

'Strange departures made he then—yea, Departments stranger  
still,  
Half a dozen Englishmen helped the Rajah with a will,  
Talked of noble aims and high, hinted of a future fine  
For the State of Kolazai, on a strictly Western line.

'Rajah Rustum held his peace ; lowered octroi dues a half ;  
Organised a State Police ; purified the Civil Staff :  
Settled cess and tax afresh in a very liberal way ;  
Cut temptations of the flesh—also cut the Bukhshi's pay ;

'Roused his Secretariat to a fine Mahratta fury,  
By a Hookum hinting at supervision of *dasturi* ;  
Turned the State of Kolazai very nearly upside down ;  
When the end of May was nigh waited his achievements'  
crown.

'Then the Birthday Honours came. Sad to state and sad to  
see,  
Stood against the Rajah's name nothing more than C.I.E. !  
. . . . .

Things were lively for a week in the State of Kolazai.  
Even now the people speak of that time regretfully.

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'How he disendowed the Gaol—stopped at once the city  
 drain ;  
 Turned to beauty fair and frail—got his senses back again ;  
 Doubled taxes, cesses, all ; cleared away each new-built  
*thana* ;  
 Turned the two-lakh Hospital into a superb *zenana* ;  
 'Heaped upon the Bukhshi Sahib wealth and honours manifold ;  
 Clad himself in Eastern garb—squeezed his people as of old :  
 Happy, happy Kolazai ! never more will Rustum Beg  
 Play to catch the Viceroy's eye. He prefers the "simpkin"  
 peg.'

A few samples of the wisdom, which either is or  
 is not the product of more or less extensive experience  
 of Anglo-India, may be given as completing the picture.  
 They come to us under the guise of 'certain maxims of Hafiz.'

Thus does the Mohammedan poet and sage remark  
 with a kindly charity on the ways of infidel officials,  
 civil or military :

'Yea, though a Kafir die, to him is remitted Jehannum  
 If he borrowed in life from a native at sixty per cent. per  
 annum.'

Hafiz has his own opinions as to the true nature  
 of the foreign *râj* :

'Who are the rulers of Ind—to whom shall we bow the knee?  
 Make your peace with the women, and men will make you  
 L.G.'

Yet let us beware of one of the methods in vogue  
 for achieving this purpose :

## MR. RUDYARD KIPLING'S VERSE 197

'As the thriftless gold of the *babul*,<sup>1</sup> so is the gold that we  
spend  
On a Derby sweep, or our neighbour's wife, or the horse we  
buy from a friend.'

The equine business on the banks of the Indus  
and the Ganges is even worse, it would appear, than  
that which concerns the female of our species :

'The ways of a man with a maid be strange, yet simple and  
tame  
To the ways of a man with a horse, when selling or racing  
that same.'

All of which tends to produce in us a certain large  
and philosophic tolerance. Thus :

'If he play, being young and unskilful, for shekels of silver  
and gold,  
Take his money, my son, praising Allah. The kid was  
ordained to be sold.'

Yet the deeper note is not altogether absent—  
the deeper note which tells us of that India with  
which Mr. Kipling has done more than any one else  
to make us familiar :

'Hard her service, poor her payment,—  
She in ancient tattered raiment—  
India, she the grim Stepmother of our kind.'

Indeed, it is with the one strong enunciation of this

<sup>1</sup> The *babul* is the jungle mimosa, and has a bright yellow  
blossom.



note in the whole book that he sees fit to close. 'The Galley Slave,' the last of the ditties, comes very near being a splendid poem. It has eight or nine verses, which can be quoted as the most powerful expression of the heart and soul of the true Anglo-India which has yet been sung or said for the instruction of 'a sheltered people.'

'Oh, gallant was our galley, from her carven steering-wheel  
To her figure-head of silver and her beak of hammered steel;  
The leg-bar chafed the ankle and we gasped for cooler air,  
But no galley in the water with our galley could compare.

'Our bulkheads bulged with cotton and our masts were  
stepped in gold—  
We ran a mighty merchandise of niggers in the hold;  
The white foam spun behind us, and the black shark swam  
below,  
As we gripped the kicking sweep-head and we made that  
galley go.

'It was merry in the galley; for we revelled now and then—  
If they wore us down like cattle, faith, we fought and loved  
like men!  
As we snatched her thro' the water, so we snatched a minute's  
bliss,  
And the mutter of the dying never spoiled the lover's kiss. . . .

'Bear witness, once my comrades, what a hard-bit gang were  
we—  
The servants of the sweep-head, but the masters of the sea!  
By the hands that drove her forward as she plunged and  
yawed and sheered,  
Woman, man, or God, or devil, was there anything we  
feared?

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'Was it storm? Our fathers faced it, and a wilder never  
blew;  
Earth that waited for the wreckage watched the galley  
struggle through.  
Burning noon or choking midnight, sickness, sorrow, parting,  
death?  
Nay, our very babes would mock you had they time for idle  
breath. . . .

'Yet they talk of times and seasons and of woe the years bring  
forth,  
Of our galley swamped and shattered in the rollers of the  
North.  
When the niggers break the hatches and the decks are gay  
with gore,  
And a craven-hearted pilot crams her crashing on the shore.

'She will need no half-mast signal, minute-gun, or rocket-  
flare;  
When the cry for help goes seaward, she will find her servants  
there.  
Battered chain-gangs of the orlop, grizzled drafts of years  
gone by,  
To the bench that broke their manhood they shall lash  
themselves and die.

'Hale and crippled, young and aged, paid, deserted, shipped  
away—  
Palace, cot, and lazaretto shall make up the tale that day,  
When the skies are black above them and the decks ablaze  
beneath,  
And the top-men clear the raffle with their clasp-knives in  
their teeth.'

The two finest lines here, the first couplet of the  
fifth verse, are followed by two that are feeble beyond  
expression, and make one doubt of everything; yet

not unreasonably might a man who could write the whole piece as it stands tell us that he felt he was yet destined to perform on other instruments of the Muses beside the banjo—not unreasonably might he still sing and tend the deserted Shrine, in the hope that

‘Some deity on wandering wing  
Might there incline,  
And, finding all in order meet,  
Stay while he worshipped at her feet.’

## II

### ‘BARRACK-ROOM BALLADS AND OTHER VERSES’

On the *Departmental Ditties* followed much in the life of their author which counted for an extraordinary stimulus and expansion, and which must be taken into account in any estimate of his later work. It is given to the experience of few writers to awake and find themselves famous. Those who achieve fame achieve it for the most part slowly and with effort, and are too sick of the thing to care much for it when they have got it. Mr. Kipling, after the sojourn of a few years in his town of banishment, was suddenly called upon to shake off the shifting dust wherewith he played, and cast away the bread of discontent wherewith he balked his hunger, for a residence in metropolitan haunts of

ease, with all the fun of the fair and the fat morsels thereof thrown in with liberal hand. His vogue was the most universal one of our time. His popular limitations were plentiful enough, his cheap effects were glaring enough, to win him the applause of the intellectual groundlings, the noisy, imperious 'pit' of our contemporary theatre of art. Yet his achievement was so real and striking, his contribution to literature was so undeniable, that no one possessed of candour and intelligence could refuse to take him seriously. He had revealed to us, if partially and askew, still with singular power and vividness, what Anglo-India meant—what the life of the Anglo-Indian civil servant and soldier meant; and he had lifted the short story, as an expression of thought and emotion, a whole plane higher than he had found it. In return for this, not only did he receive the golden wages of an enthusiastic appreciation, but the passionate and general instinct repaid his revelation to us of broader and more animating horizons by the revelation of himself to himself. The cry was, 'Tell us of India—tell us of our redcoats! You can—will—must!' A year ago, in reviewing his tales, I was complaining of the injustice of the dedication of *Soldiers Three* to 'that very strong man, T. Atkins,' whereas there was little or nothing of T. Atkins in the book, but merely the old long-service

man, concerning whom it is written: 'Ichabod, or, the glory is departed.' And I pleaded for the disappearance of Mulvaney, Ortheris, and Learoyd, the d'Artagnan, Aramis, and Porthos of a later day, who had provided good sport for us all at times, but were now visibly fallen into the sere and yellow leaf. I cannot flatter myself that my humble protest and plea could have any effect upon a self-sufficiency so magnificent as that of Mr. Kipling, especially in the face of the chorus of reckless and indiscriminate praise lavished upon him all round; but there can happily be no mistake on this occasion as to the justice of his second dedication to 'T. A.' For the first time our 'sheltered people' has heard something approaching an adequate statement of the point of view of the 'poor beggars in red' who have bought us 'half of creation with the sword and the flame, and have salted it down with their bones.' That is the significance of the *Barrack-Room Ballads* as regards the general public. They are a statement of Tommy's case as powerful and convincing as it is passionate and sincere. This may not be the real Tommy in his totality. Mr. Kipling, with commendable modesty, leaves that to the decision of Tommy himself, who alone can tell him if what he has written is 'true.' But there can be no mistake about the fact that this is at least the *Wahrheit*

*und Dichtung*—the truth and the poetry—of Tommy, and to have added this to a like achievement concerning Anglo-India, and a certain portion of India, is a record of which any man under thirty might well be proud. The *Barrack-Room Ballads* have caught on, as the Americans say, even more decisively than the Anglo-Indian stories, and they have already had an ample, perhaps too ample a measure of justice done to them. In one way they are Mr. Kipling's most genuine personal expression. He threw away the scabbard when he wrote them, and came to the test with those of us who had complained that his earlier work was as good as his latest, and that the bolt seemed shot. Certainly the result proves that, whether or not the bolt was shot in his prose, it was not in his verse, and it is freely to be admitted that he has not only turned back upon himself and put his ancient speech to fresh rhyme and rhythm, but has also struck out notes entirely new. There is only one word for the *Ballads*, viewed from the calmer point of view of criticism, and that is 'taking.' They are wonderfully and tremendously taking. The very cockney *canaille* of the dialect in which Tommy is made to express himself has the true contagion of the best music-hall patter song of the hour. The question that arises, of course, is: 'But is this

product good enough, strong enough, verifiable enough to last?' No single ballad has had such a *furor* of success as 'Fuzzy-Wuzzy.' A snatch, a line here and there, seems already to have passed into our daily speech, but has it passed permanently? Is not the hour close at hand in which we shall all be hopelessly sick of

'E's a daisy, 'e's a ducky, 'e's a lamb!  
'E's a injia-rubber idiot on the spree'?

or of

'We never got a ha'porth's change of 'im :  
'E squatted in the scrub an' 'ocked our 'orses,  
'E cut our sentries up at *Suakim*,  
An' 'e played the cat an' banjo with our forces'?

Doggerel, clever doggerel, attractive doggerel, but doggerel so much above the best of the music-hall as to win it a time-honoured place—inspired doggerel, in a word? Ah, that is less certain! The more often one reads these *Ballads*, the 'thinner and thinner appear the worst of them, the more and more dubious all but one or two of the very best; and as for the 'other verses,' the twenty poems that follow them up, there are some of them so appallingly bad that they paralyse all efforts at consideration. When you have taken out three or four, the others are simply non-existent. The drop in Mr. Kipling is always straight from the stars into the puddles. He has no middle

place, no gradual process of descent. And yet this is not quite so, for at least half a dozen instances could be quoted of his success at spoiling good work by flaws in workmanship, or by his uncertainty of touch. But then his uncertainty of touch is perpetual. It is rarely that he is quite sure how he is working, that he entirely transfuses his material. Take his use of allegory. Could anything be more stupidly and annoyingly obscure than 'The Three Captains'? The whole matter treated of was quite ephemeral, and one may almost say quite personal. He makes an elaborate allegory of it where his letch for technical terms runs riot. Even in the 'Galley Slave,' his one success in this style, he cannot help trying to show us how well up he is in nautical phraseology, as if in an allegory any pressure of the symbolism were not the most obvious futility. Of course, when he attempts direct portrayal, he doses us with his peculiar pedantries to the top of his bent. The *Bolivar* doesn't drift seven days and seven nights merely: she drifts to the Start, because everybody ought to know that the Start is a bit of local colour. Her 'coal and fo'c'sle are short'; her 'bulk-heads fly'; she 'hogs' and 'sags' and 'races'; the seas pound at her 'strake'; the Lord, it is hoped, has 'his thumb on the plummer-block,' and so on. Clever, isn't it? But (as Mr. Kipling says the devil



keeps inquiring), 'Is it art?' To tell the simple truth, it reads rather more like juvenile vanity. Or, again, there is the equal uncertainty of touch which afflicts him when he attempts to write with an assured poetical diction. The 'Ballad of East and West' is such an attempt, and it is the least like a failure of them all. ('The English Flag' is a remarkable instance of how he *can* fail when he really makes up his mind to show us that he is a master of style *quâ* style.) It is, indeed, curious to note how he can write, even in work that has stirred him, galvanised conventionalism side by side with the most vivid and actual realism. Yet he does it again and again. The magnanimous Afghan of this Ballad, for instance, 'whistles his only son,' who, like unto the good young only sons of all the robber chiefs in our more or less pseudo-literature, and also unto our old, old poetic friend the eagle or the hawk or the falcon, or any other member of the *genus raptor*, 'drops from the mountain crest.' Then Mr. Kipling suddenly looks at him as he is, and describes him in one admirable line like this:

'He trod the ling like a buck in spring, and he looked like a lance at rest.'

Fancy that being the line that follows and rhymes with the venerable crest-dropping business! It is

almost as bad as the terrible second couplet in the fifth stanza of the 'Galley Slave.'

So much, then, for the outer shape taken by his limitations. The shape they take in the essential qualities of his spirit and intellect is far more disconcerting, because in his happier moments, with thought and emotion at the white-heat, he again and again transcends his tricks of inferior workmanship; but it is, indeed, rarely that he ever quite transcends his tricks of clap-trap sentiment. 'Gunga Din' is one of the very finest of the *Ballads*; it is not too much to say of it that it comes very near being a little masterpiece of its kind. He gives the picture of the 'regimental bhisti,' the devoted 'limpin' lump of brick-dust,' who 'didn't seem to know the use of fear' in his thankless duty of water-carrier to the men, fighting or wounded, on the march, or in camp, or under fire. The particular Tommy who tells the story relates how, when he dropped behind the fight, 'with a bullet where his belt-plate should 'a' been,' it was the inevitable Gunga Din who spied him first, lifted up his head, plugged his wound, gave him a drink, and finally carried him away to a dooli. At this point a bullet comes and drills Gunga Din clean; but, none the less, he puts Tommy safe inside, and, just before rendering up the ghost,

" 'I'ope you liked your drink,' sez Gunga Din' !

Could a falser note have been struck? Of course, Gunga Din never said anything of the kind. It was Mr. Rudyard Kipling who said it, because it was one of those superficially smart things which he and his friends, the groundlings, cannot resist. Again and again he does it. The fat Babu Harendra sends the head of a Burman dacoit chief in a packet to an English officer who had, in a moment of baffled impotence, promised 'a hundred' for it; and this is the way the Babu Harendra Mukerji opens his letter:

'Dear Sir,—I have honour to send, as you said,  
For final approval (see under) Boh's Head.'

Of course, that 'for final approval (see under)' was never written by the Babu. The real writer was *aut Kipling aut diabolus*. Now, what is the good of giving an intensely realistic picture, crammed with technical terms and concentrated characterisation, to end it up with a piece of burlesque like this?

But false characterisation in his art is, unhappily, only too well matched with inconsequence in his criticism. The same unscrupulousness which causes him to indulge in cheap wit at the expense of the sincerity of his *dramatis personæ*, causes him to indulge in antiquated sentimental clap-trap at the expense of his own. There was, from Mr. Kipling's

point of view, a quite sufficiently scathing denunciation to be made out of the Irish M.P.'s who were 'cleared' by the *Times* Commission, without pandering to the 'gods' of the Orange gallery. As it is, the whole poem he devotes to the subject rings false from first line to last. Not even the most resolute anti-Home Ruler can believe that a picture of Ireland, where 'the widow's curse is on the house' of the Irish M.P., 'and the dead are at his door,' is quite a complete one. What a pretty task for an honest and intelligent man in this year of grace to glorify the Irish absentee landlord by painting the 'patriotic' brutes and hypocrites he has brought into existence considerably blacker than painted devils! Can it indeed be Mr. Kipling who writes:

' "The charge is old"?—as old as Cain—as fresh as yesterday;  
*Old as the Ten Commandments*—have ye talked these laws  
 away?'—

Mr. Kipling, the 'illustrator' of Anglo-Indian social life, with five out of the six 'illustrations' based on breakage of the Seventh Commandment—Mr. Kipling, the enthusiastic mouthpiece of the individual who prays:

'Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the  
 worst,  
 Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man can  
 raise a thirst'?

Again, every parvenu has a right to take his new social gods *au grand sérieux*, but one does not, somehow, expect a man of genius to outdo even the most abject of them at their forms of worship. Mr. Kipling thinks the earth has produced nothing to equal a 'gentleman,' and he is within his rights in thinking so. For our old friend the gentleman is a really nice fellow, of course, as the average sensual man slightly idealised was to be expected to be; yet even the gentleman nowadays does not quite mistake himself for an archangel. But our poetical young parvenu does. He tells in sounding numbers of the earth's heroic workers:

'Gods, for they knew the heart of men; men, for they stooped to fame';

and in his ecstatic contemplation of them (unlike the Irish M.P.'s in this particular, but like Mr. Rudyard Kipling, they are adepts in 'God's law,' including presumably the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, and most of the Catechism), he beholds them having a real good time in heaven, 'hanging with the reckless Seraphim on the reins of red-maned stars,' and so on. Then we have the culmination. God the Father appears:

'And oftentimes cometh our wise Lord God, master of every trade,  
And tells them tales of His daily toil, of Edens newly made;  
*And they rise to their feet as He passes by, gentlemen unafraid!*

There is only one word for that last line: it is stupendous. Those gentlemen archangels preclude anything but an amazed silence. Comment is impossible beyond the simple enunciation of the fact that they belong to literature—to the literature of Southey's vision of the apotheosis of George III.

But let us turn from the painful spectacle of such aberrations on the part of a man who has done so much better than this in every way.

Adam Lindsay Gordon was a poet of an altogether larger and broader calibre than Mr. Kipling, but the parallel between them has more than one interesting and suggestive feature. Both as a workman and as a critic of life a certain instinct preserved the Anglo-Australian from the grosser faults of the Anglo-Indian. Gordon could only use rhymed rhythms, but he knew it, and shunned, by a rigid adherence to his own special domain, such horrors as Mr. Kipling has achieved in his blank verse. The want of delicacy of music, of melodious lyric, in Gordon is indisputable, but at least he does not thrust it upon us by offensive efforts. Mr. Kipling is, as a rule, most at home when he is using a stanza to which he can mark time with his heels, and the modern 'jingle' ballad has assuredly its justification. But what justification is there for verse, the time of which the hapless versifier has had to mark on his fingers?

In a poem like 'Route Marchin' he gives us the very tramp of the negro camp-ditties—a form of poetical rhythm which has yet to have justice done to it by our writers. But when he essays the lighter note, how terrible are his mishaps! Gordon, again, had pretty much the same general view of life that the other has, but, being simply a gentleman by birth and breeding, he never ranted and raved like a frenzied parvenu concerning the superhuman virtues and glories of *caste*. It is when we put two such men side by side, as it is just to do and profitable to do, that we see clearly the fatal limitations and defects which relegate the one not only to the more ephemeral but to the lower place. Little, very little, of Mr. Kipling's poetry has the element of permanency in it. Rarely, very rarely, does he forge ahead and win the race with ease. Life's handicap, the handicap of temperament and surroundings, is too heavy for him. He contributes no appreciable body of work. It is mostly *tour de force*, excellently brilliant, delightfully clever, 'monstrously taking,' but it does not wear—it does not wear as twenty or thirty per cent. of Gordon's work wears. It has come like a meteor, to pass: not like a star, to stay. Yet not for a moment would I seem to undervalue the charm and satisfaction of the best poems—the best snatches. Once, and once only, as it seems to

me, does he pass beyond the limits of poetic phases and fashions, and attain the goal of desire. Other poems have their obvious advantages over 'Mandalay,' but no other, unless I am much mistaken, can challenge criticism on all its points and challenge it with such success as this. I have given no sample of his powerful impressionist doggerel. 'Fuzzy-Wuzzy' and 'Screw-Guns,' 'Gunga Din' and 'Oonts,' 'Snarley-Yow' and 'The Young British Soldier,' are in everybody's mouth. Let me give part of a poem where, for once, his song is instinct with the lyrical cry, with the note of 'the tears of things,' the eternal voice of human regret :

'By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin' eastward to the sea,  
There's a Burma girl a-settin', and I know she thinks o' me ;  
For the wind is in the palm-trees, and the temple-bells they say :  
"Come you back, you British soldier ; come you back to  
Mandalay !"

Come you back to Mandalay,  
Where the old Flotilla lay :  
Can't you 'ear their paddles chunkin' from Rangoon to  
Mandalay ?  
On the road to Mandalay,  
Where the flyin'-fishes play,  
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China 'crost  
the Bay !

'Er petticoat was yaller an' 'er little cap was green,  
An' 'er name was Supi-yaw-lat, jes' the same as Theebaw's  
Queen,  
An' I seed her first a-smokin' of a whackin' white cheroot,  
An' a-wastin' Christian kisses on an 'eathen idol's foot :



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Bloomin' idol made o' mud—  
 Wot they called the Great Gawd Budd—  
 Plucky lot she cared for idols when I kissed 'er where  
     she stud !  
 On the road to Mandalay . . .

    .     .     .     .     .     .     .  
 ' I am sick o' wastin' leather on these gritty pavin'-stones,  
 An' the blasted Henglish drizzle wakes the fever in my bones ;  
 Tho' I walks with fifty 'ousemaids outer Chelsea to the Strand,  
 An' they talks a lot o' lovin', but wot do they understand ?  
     Beefy face an' grubby 'and—  
     Law ! wot do they understand ?  
 I've a neater, sweeter maiden in a cleaner, greener land !  
 On the road to Mandalay . . .

' Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the  
     worst,  
 Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man can  
     raise a thirst ;  
 For the temple-bells are callin', an' it's there that I would be—  
 By the old Moulmein Pagoda, looking lazy at the sea ;  
     On the road to Mandalay,  
     Where the old Flotilla lay,  
     With our sick beneath the awnings when we went to  
         Mandalay !  
     O the road to Mandalay,  
     Where the flyin'-fishes play,  
     An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China 'crost  
         the Bay !'

A hundred years hence some appreciative and  
 inquiring person may be searching in the British  
 Museum for any other work done by the man who  
 wrote 'Mandalay.'

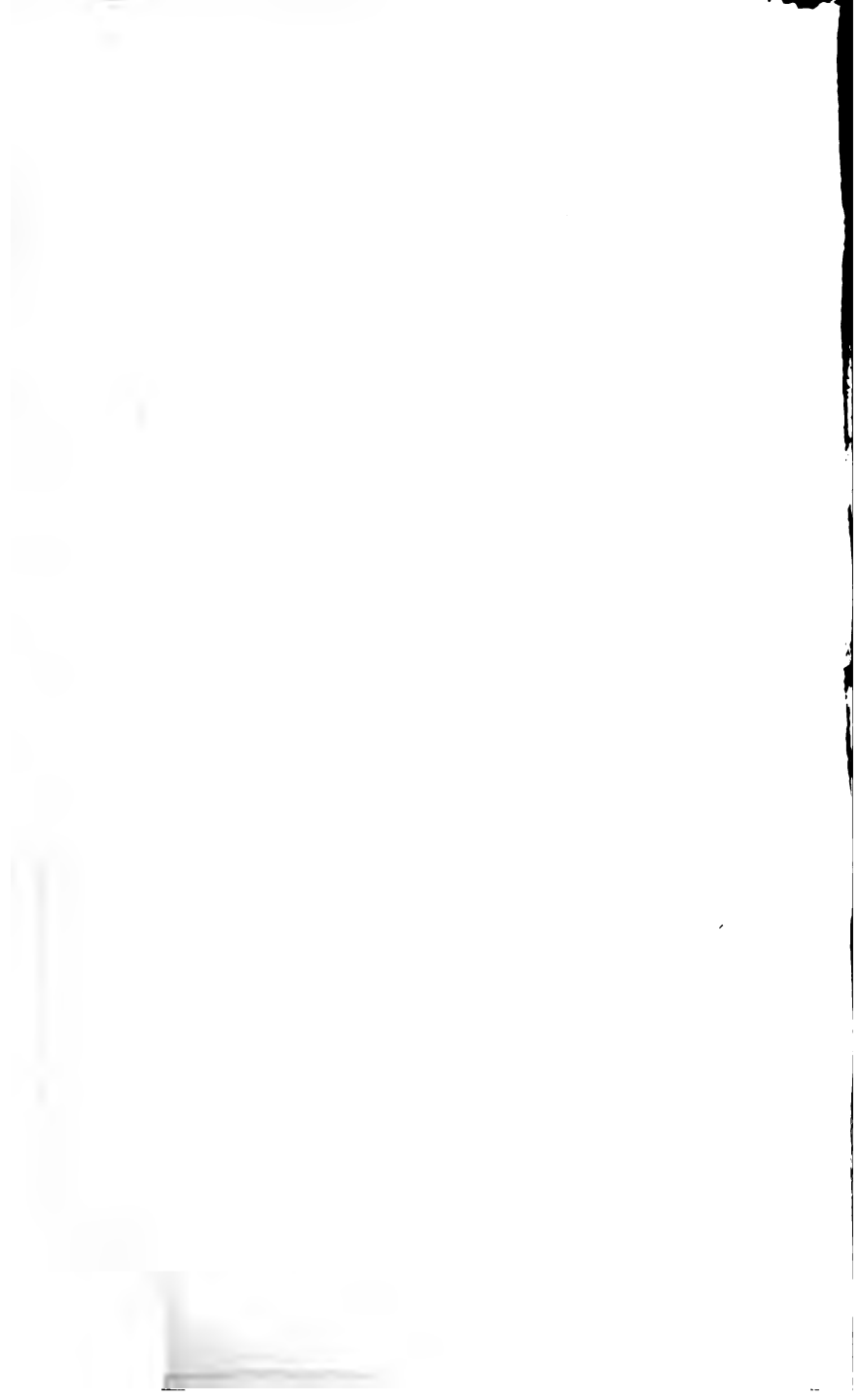
Truly like unto angels' visits are the books which

come to us as a sudden and sheer delight; and the reason is simple. For what in reality is rarer than freshness wedded to sincerity and strength at one with beauty? But few and far between as are such visitants from the mighty realm of the past, from the meagre realm of the present they come with an infrequency that is hateful, if indeed one might almost say they come at all. Let us not, therefore, be inveigled into forgetfulness of the fact of those first rapturous moments in any estimate we form of any writer who has been able to bestow them, seeing that, things being equal, this power has assuredly its justification for the critic's praise. And some such *memento laudis* is what I would fain affix here to my effort to speak, as adequately as I have been able, of Mr. Rudyard Kipling's verse, because the first perusal of the splendid score of his *Barrack-Room Ballads* gave me the keenest pleasure I have had in reading a book of poetry for several years. The second part of the volume, containing the 'Other Verses,' which, in his wisdom (or in the necessity of providing sufficient material for a seemly crown octavo at six shillings, or in the intention of a compromise between the two), he has seen fit to add, soon checked that pleasure, and presently chilled it to the bone. The rapturous moments of sheer and sudden delight, alas! were ended. A few days later

the *Departmental Ditties* (also supplemented, as we have seen, by a liberal supply of 'Other Verses,' good, bad, and indifferent) arrived to remove the last effects of that chill by the creation of the sense of perspective; and now it appears to me no longer strange that the man who wrote 'Fuzzy-Wuzzy,' 'Gunga Din,' and 'Mandalay,' wrote also 'Evarra and his Gods' and 'The Sacrifice of Er-Heb' (candour urges me to confess that I have not yet been able to read this poem in its entirety) and 'The Explanation,' any more than it should be strange that the same man should have given us, with (apparently) a serious face, 'The Drums of the Fore and Aft,' 'At the Pit's Mouth,' 'The Courting of Dinah Shadd,' as well as 'The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney,' 'Namgay Doola,' and 'The Lang Men o' Larut.'

# **THE HUNT FOR HAPPINESS**

**A DIALOGUE**



## THE HUNT FOR HAPPINESS

### A DIALOGUE

WILSON rose and, quietly opening the door, passed into the bedroom of his friend.

Randal in his dressing-gown lay stretched upon the sofa by the open window, half-asleep, half-awake, enjoying the last delicious sensations of the siesta.

Outside was the eternal panorama of the Mediterranean, glaucous and glassily wreathing under the stifling heat of a cloudy sun. Here and there its semi-circular monotony was broken by the red-tiled roofs of the houses, which seemed to be undergoing some imperfect process of fumigation as the eddies of the fitful breeze lifted and dispersed the fine and foul-smelling dust of the streets and promenades. A bird sang wearily but persistently in one of the dingy trees of the hotel garden, and a canary, in a cage in a neighbouring apartment, burst every now and then into ear-ringing and emulous song—two burthens at such an hour worse than the biblical grasshopper. Finally, a young Italian girl, with a monkey and a

brazen and cracked falsetto, had just concluded a dirgelike ditty, and gone her weary way.

This had decided Wilson.

Now he drew a chair close beside his friend, who lay drowsily regarding him.

'Look here,' he said, 'this is getting on to my nerves. I want to go out and away into some fresh air. Do you care to come?'

'Go out?' murmured Randal, 'get away? Why, it's ten times worse in the town, or down on the Boulevard de la Croisette, or in a boat.'

'Let us take a carriage and drive up on to one of the hills. If there is a breeze anywhere, it will be there. And then we can lie down under the pines, and smoke till the heat passes, and it's time to come back to dinner.'

'We shall be cooked alive in the roads getting there.'

'We'll have a cab with an awning.'

Randal stretched himself.

'Be it so,' he said. 'Milton was wrong. It is good-nature, not ambition, which is really the last infirmity of noble mind, and in no way is good-nature better exemplified than in letting other people look after you. No doubt you are right, and it will be much pleasanter up in the pine-woods. You are still young enough, Allan, to think things out. All

the same, I shall have no gratitude if it is so, and, if we experience any discomfort, I shall blame you to the very best of my ability.'

Wilson rose.

'I will order the cab,' he said, 'while you wash, and in ten minutes we'll be away.'

'And truly,' reflected Randal, as he took off his dressing-gown and prepared to sponge his face and head, 'Cannes in the latter half of April begins to be a mistake—especially if you don't know how to profit by the siesta, and perceive that the strawberries have no real flavour.'

His prophecy, however, as to the culinary perils of the roads had but a half-fulfilment.

The meteorological change, that had been preparing itself during the last hour or more, now began to operate markedly.

The clouds were in movement, lifting and drifting slowly to the west, as the south-east breeze came tripping along the coast. The sea took deeper colour from the unencumbered sky, losing its sinister pallors. The tree-tops, stiffened pine and plummy eucalyptus, swayed and rustled. Life seemed astir again, and, though in the streets that were swept by the rising breeze the dust soared in sheets, the two friends were soon mounting the northering zig-zags beyond its reach. They passed on through terraced



olive-gardens and fruit-orchards, cool with the running waters of the old stone conduits, and then by the verge of woody gorges, the cleft and rocky sides of the road sparkling with mica, or coloured with masses of red sandstone, pierced here and there with a vein of marble or spar. Cannes lay below and behind them, only seen by glimpses at the turnings through the moving foliage, with the islands of Lérins, St. Marguerite, and St. Honorat, working round to the west, the white-walled houses shining in the stream of sunlight.

They mounted in silence, till suddenly the driver turned in his seat to point across the flat, low-lying plain before them to the west. It stretched, ruddy and monotonous, back from the blue semi-circle of the bay to the line of serrated hills that shut out the horizon. Rectilinear lines of plane-trees, geometric avenues, hedged about the environs of a village.

‘That is Bocca, monsieur,’ he said to Wilson; ‘and those hills are the Estrel and the Paveron.’

Wilson acknowledged the value and interest of the information, and the driver once more gave himself up to the onomatopœic encouragement of his nags. Randal had for some time said nothing; for the volumes of the free fresh air dilating his lungs were giving him considerable physical pleasure, and pleasure (more especially his own) was one of the

few (the very few) things he held as sacred. Rare and short-lived are its visits. The chiefest wisdom of life is to make the most of them.

But the driver was encouraged to further speech.

Once more he suddenly turned in his seat, and pointing apparently to some spot between the avenues and the distant hills, he announced that a hermit lived down there.

Wilson was amused, and asked for particulars, which were readily given.

'But perhaps,' said the little man, 'monsieur is a Protestant? Each one has his special form of religion.'

'No,' said Wilson. 'They are all interesting.'

The driver turned back again in puzzled silence, and they went on once more up the zig-zag.

'Why,' growled Randal, 'did you say that? You know that no form of religion interests us in the least. It is all an indistinguishable hash of effete symbolism and more or less degraded superstition.'

'Yet certain forms of it still satisfy human souls.'

'Only the lower types. What is stimulating those few, who are worth talking about and who still remain within the religious pale, is either the intellectual exercise of the new critical and historical methods, or else the democratic and socialistic aspects of the Founder's early teaching, both of them brought into

being by modern and secular movements from without. Culture and Socialism are transmuting everything, but, for Heaven's sake, let us have them at first hand. Spare us the noble army of tinkers.'

'But what does one gain by severing one's kinship with these people? Many of them have beautiful souls.'

'Now let us begin the praise of good-looking and devout women! Tell me that their timid and lovely twaddle had its inspiration. Take off your hat to their pure faith. It helps the world so immensely just now to go through life believing in *Jack and the Beanstalk* and the *Seven Champions of Christendom*. Kneel before their faithful purity. We all know that it means keeping game-preserves for the use of select parties, Mohammed's heaven on earth for the well-to-do gentlemen who are tired of adventures. A plentiful want of brains and a few lesser maladies in a chronic condition will conduct almost any man into the honeyed haunts of that dupery before he is forty. I am on the way there myself. But you are still a young man who dreams dreams and piques himself on being sincere.'

'Your bitterness,' said Wilson, 'carries you, as it seems to me, as far away from the truth as your indifference. For you generalise indiscriminately in both. No, Ned; talk like that will not go down.'

You are merely exercising your privilege of blame, and don't want to be taken seriously. You said the other day that you liked the piquancy of the contrast between the ante- and post-prandial humours, just as you did the alternations of the languor and ferocity of the tropics; but perseverance and the search for the middle humour are the gifts of the temperate zones of the West and the North. Why do you want to disintegrate us? There is no firmer foundation for anything like happiness than the comprehension of one's fellows. When you cannot understand the look in their eyes, you feel like a mournful pilgrim in an alien country. A glance, a smile, that makes a man articulate to you and you to him, strikes a note of pleasure in you, and makes the world the habitat of intelligence.'

'In theory. In practice I find the banality of the smiles and glances only disgusts and wearies me. There is nothing new. The essential want of variety in things is ghastly. Why, when I skim through a photograph album full of unknown people, do I feel I have met them all and been bored by them all? Here and there, once in a hundred pages, a sweet face suddenly strikes me, or a strong face. For a few moments it interests me. I even think of it afterwards. Two days later I return to it. Surely I dreamed! It is just as commonplace, as common

as the others! There are at any given moment in the world a hundred persons at most who are worth seeing and talking to for more than once. You can talk to almost any one once—to a few twice; to almost no one three times. If it were not for the perpetual arrival of new events, we should draw knives on one another and smite under the fifth rib. But luckily something is always happening. That is what saves us.'

The other was silent.

'Why don't you confute me?' asked Randal.

'Because you are merely restating your disillusioned individualism. I remember (that hermit of the driver's oddly enough recalls it to me) once hearing you adopt a phrase, which was also a theory of life, of Henri Beyle's, and giving in your savage adherence to it. *La chasse au bonheur*—the hunt for happiness, that is the story of each of us from hour to hour, from day to day, from year to year. We rise in the morning equipped *tant bien que mal* with the implements for the capture of the game, and we return in the evening to eat and sleep, having failed or succeeded. The *Jagd-lust* takes a hundred thousand shapes; the *Jagd-ordnung* varies perpetually. We cover it all up with innumerable lies and self-deceptions; but there, in one word, is the simple, brutal truth concerning the life of each and every

living person and thing—*la chasse au bonheur*—the hunt for happiness.’

‘And I still give in my adherence, savage or otherwise, to that theory of life.’

‘It has grave defects.’

‘Let us have some of them.’

‘Well, firstly, like all formulæ it is far too narrow. When you try to explain the earth as it is—man as he is—civilisation as it is, by any formula whatever, you have to leave out nearly half of the facts. The celebrated theory of the struggle for existence and survival of the fittest, for instance, leads us into the most hopeless errors unless we perpetually remember that the word “fittest” has here no ethical sense whatever, and merely means fittest under any given set of circumstances. The lower type may be the fittest, and among parasites we see that it is so. But even when we have realised this, which nine evolutionists out of ten practically do not, we are still far away from our comfortable and complete little ‘Open Sesame’ for the big treasure-cave of life. The complexity of things eludes us. The struggle for existence has continually to be applied altruistically. The individual often perishes to save, or try to save—not itself but another individual, or a few other individuals, or many, for the sake of some idea, sometimes of a character almost wholly abstract.

Do you leave all this out of account in your explanation of things? What a delusion! Why, you are just the same pedant as the teleological theologian, only on the other side.'

'But in every case every action is merely a step in the *chasse au bonheur*. Beyle's definition beats Darwin's. For Beyle's has no exceptions. That is all.'

'Do you believe that? Does all human action, or even all animal action, seem to you explicable as effort, conscious or unconscious, after happiness? I give you the most generous interpretation, but, when you have used it to the full, do you still hold that the hunt in some shape or other is the unfailing motive?'

'Accepting your gift of the most generous interpretation, I do.'

'Well, I suppose the battle will centre round the word "unconscious." Your theory seems to me to contain in solution the venerable fallacy of free-will. You suppose both men and animals far more deliberately set to a goal than I think they are. You call the goal happiness, and that is a very clever way of putting it. It is more than clever; it is illuminative. But your claim for it is surely too large. Granted that a considerable number—a very considerable number—of our efforts, thoughts, words,

and actions can justly be described as consciously or unconsciously making for happiness, are there not still a great many which are either quite automatic and purposeless, or else done under an exterior constraint over which we have no control,—which consciously or unconsciously, or both, we would rightly or wrongly fain not do,—which it makes us unhappy to do, and yet which the pressure brought to bear upon us from without compels us to do?’

Randal reflected a moment.

‘Those automatic and purposeless actions,’ he said, ‘I won’t give up to you, because, if they don’t make for happiness now, they once did, or were intended to do, either in ourselves or in our ancestors.’

Wilson smiled.

‘You are giving them up to me right off,’ he said. ‘Our ancestors! our ancestors make us do this or that! And what on earth have our ancestors to do with our hunt for happiness? No more than our friends and relations, and the community generally, which also makes us do that and this, whether it concerns us or not.’

‘You are a devil,’ growled Randal. ‘You think things out. Thank God! I never did. If I had, I should have laundered all my poetry the way you have laundered most of your painting. Art should be simple and sensuous, as even the theologico-idealist



Milton saw. I never did a better thing in my life than carry you off from London for a long holiday. That last picture of yours was all infernalised allegory, which comes directly of thinking things out.'

The driver drew up. They were on the top plateau of the Croix des Gardes.

'But,' said Wilson, laughing, 'that is only the beginning of my criticism on your theory.'

'If,' said the driver, 'the gentlemen would alight here and mount by there' (pointing to a path) 'on to the top of the hill, they would see something very fine.'

'I'll give you the second part,' said Wilson, getting out, 'from the top of the hill in front of the something very fine.'

'By the Lord, no!' said Randal. 'If I climb up the side of that roof, it is in search of happiness, not of your criticism on my theory of it.'

The path was rough, the vagabond windings of the tracks of successive pilgrims of the picturesque, and they mounted slowly. The western side of the hill was protected from the breeze, and the sun beat upon it with force, raising up the perfume of the fallen pine-needles in hot gusts. The underwood was mostly broom, brilliantly lit with fresh and yellow blossom. At last they emerged on the hill-top, a flat and open space with a pile of dark stone

on the seaward edge, surmounted by a rude pillar on which a plain iron cross stood out against the sky. On the roughly hewn stone seat at the base a young girl lay back with a book in her lap.

As the two men came forward, their eyes crossed hers.

She had been looking to the south-east towards the fortification of St. Marguerite, but now she turned her head and gazed at them with a simple and inquiring directness.

Randal glanced impatiently aside, confident of the disgusting fact of having stumbled on one of the unmarried of his countrywomen, but Wilson had been attracted and cast some interrogative glances.

She was small and badly dressed, in a style that was unknown to him (differing somehow from the English, American, or any foreign type which he had remarked), with an ugly face, colourless, but plastic, earnest, and intelligent, the one beauty of which were the rather large eyes of a dark brown, with their peculiar expression of an eager yet gentle and rather reflective curiosity.

She took up her book and moved her dress, and then herself a little, so that they might sit down on the seat, if they wished to.

Wilson raised his hat and said in French—

‘Please, do not disturb yourself, mademoiselle.’

'But not in the least, monsieur,' she replied, with an accent which was as unknown to him as her toilette.

They were exchanging a few casual remarks, when Randal, who had turned away, joined them with amused eyes.

'There is an inscription,' he said; 'do you see it, there on the pillar? Some devout and beautiful biblical phrase about that cross. This grove on the top of a hill would have quite a pagan feeling if it weren't for that cross, and then the inscription! Together they save it.'

The girl looked at him gravely, as if uncertain whether he was in earnest or not, and made a face.

'The inscription,' she said, in her quaint French, 'tells us that this pillar is so many hundred mètres above the level of the sea.'

Randal began laughing, and the other two followed suit.

The blue sky and waters—the sunny breeze—the pine-clad summit—the rude pile of stone like *the* remains of an antique altar—the pillar—the iron cross, and the inscription of the exact height above the sea,—his sense of humour suddenly supplied the comment.

"O dix-neuvième siècle, dix-neuvième siècle!" he quoted; 'Beyle's cry for ever returns to me at all

the solemn moments of our civilised life. Surely this is typical. Tell me, mademoiselle,' he said, with a rapid change to seriousness, 'what induced you to climb up the hill? Was it an obscure feeling, inherited from our pagan ancestors, which moved you to seek a hill-top? Or was it merely the idea of getting some fresh air, or peradventure a charming view?'

'Neither the one nor the other, monsieur,' she replied as seriously, never taking her eyes off him while he spoke. 'It was because I had been reading Maupassant's *Sur l'Eau*, which, as without doubt you may know, is an account of a voyage in his little yacht the *Bel Ami*; and from here, I was told, I could see most of the places which he describes.'

'All the same,' he murmured, looking down, 'it was the hunt for happiness.'

'On the part of Maupassant?' she asked. 'Oh, but yes! Only, after a little, he tires of all the beauty and the solitude which he so desires, and goes back—where do you think? To Monte Carlo!'

'And from thence,' he said, 'to—to—a private lunatic asylum,' he added in English. 'The hunt ended badly.'

At that moment a voice—the voice of a girl—was heard calling a name, and then a sentence, in a language unknown to both the men.

'That is my sister,' the other said, smiling and rising, 'who is calling me. They are going down. Good-day, gentlemen.'

They both saluted, and stood watching her as she crossed the clearing and disappeared through the underwood by a path on the opposite side.

'Didn't I tell you,' said Randal, 'that the perpetual arrival of new events saves us? That girl's grimace over the cross and the inscription has put me into a good humour. And she went precisely in the nick of time. There was nothing in her—nothing, nothing! Three more minutes, and our plummets would have been rattling on the shallow bottom of her poor little soul, and she would have left us disconsolate. Now we shall both of us talk with an animated inconsistency (and that means talk well), and when you are next by yourself you'll be able to think about her for a quarter of an hour or so, and exaggerate her possibilities. Very likely she was a Dane, or a Swede, or a Norwegian, and that permits you to look upon her as a problematical heroine of Ibsen's. Your vice of thinking things out will take you even so far as that.'

Wilson was silent a moment. Then he said :

'How truly, in the actual application of his theory of life, is your temper identical with Beyle's! Beyle, of course, is a Liberal—a French Liberal of 1830 ;

and he believes (so he says) in all the Liberal machinery of the hour—the Charter, the Free Press, and so on. He even tries to persuade us that he is interested in it. But in reality it utterly wearies and disgusts him, and all he cares for in his heart is aristocratic individualism, which is the aristocracy of intellect, and the most ruthless of them all. *La carrière ouverte aux talens*, Napoleon calls it, when he wants to make it specious and palatable; but when he gives forth the brutal truth of his brutal mind concerning the mass of humanity (which has no talents), he calls it simply *chair à canon*. Food for the engine that permits genius to despotise over the humiliated millions—that is the fate the aristocratic individualist, the individualist of intellect, believes to be the best possible in this worst of possible worlds. Perhaps he is correct. There is a lot to be said in favour of the theory. But whether for right or wrong, for failure or success, we are trying for something different, and we have no more dangerous foe than him who appeals to the apparently reasonable impatience and despair of men. Well, Beyle's *chasse au bonheur* is the same theory, or, rather, it comes to the same theory when Beyle puts it into practice. The chance of such stupendous success as Napoleon's, or of any stupendous success, is possible to only a very few of us. What remains

is the carrying-out in the Napoleonic temper, each on the little stage of his own life, of the same idea. For me, Beyle is summed up in two ways—in his own life and direct personal criticism, and in his masterpiece, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, one (I agree) of the few completely charming novels of the century, and it is all an illustration of what he really means by *la chasse au bonheur*. It is based on the contempt of the average man and woman, and, indeed, of all humanity. Every thing and every one are useful only in so far as they supply the material for thrilling and victorious emotion to the man of talent. Very short work, therefore, does he make of the tiresome Liberal machinery, which he cannot see is the first step in the slow and painful process of educating the community in the art of self-government. To him it is merely the hateful process of *blague* and hypocrisy, which prevents the man of talent from his rapid arrival at success. Later on, consciously or unconsciously, he cast all his nominal beliefs to the winds, and showed us, in the *Chartreuse de Parme*, where his real beliefs really led him—namely, to a complete preference for the despotic *régime* in which the man of talent has, by his very nature, a far greater chance of realising himself, if only in the shape of passionate love-intrigue, than in the modern political and civil community. The nightmare of Beyle's hours

of thought is furnished by a consideration of what life and living mean in Puritan and commercial England, and still more in commercial and Puritan America. No one, of course, sees the ghastly aspects of the modern Anglo-Saxon civilisation, which is imposing itself on the world, more acutely than he does. That is the great value and use of him, and of those like him. But the ideal tendency which underlies it all is completely hidden from him. It seemed to him an end, a conclusion, a final state, a hell of pretence and *ennui*. To us it appears rather as a purgatory, the meaning and consolation of which we find in the vague glimmers of auroral paradise which flash down upon the spectacle of our weariness and woe.'

'And so,' said Randal, 'you utterly repudiate the hunt for happiness on the recognised lines of freedom and hope for the man of talent? You are landing yourself in a pretty quagmire of played-out asceticism and sociologic jargon.'

'Not as we conceive of it, either for the man of talent or for the average man without—either for what one may call utility in the block or for beauty in the block, either for Commerce or for Art,—or so at least it appears to me. Beyle's creed at the present moment has the all but undivided allegiance of the artists. We inscribe in letters of gold over the portal of Art, the command to eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow



we die, carefully explaining, it is true, that this is to be interpreted in the most refined and catholic sense. Who has preached such charming sermons from this purely hedonistic text as the alleged idealist Renan? And Goethe is our great and patron saint. All the artists—poets, painters, musicians, writers—believe in the hunt for happiness more or less in the temper of Beyle. Rossetti writes an indignant sonnet against the Tsar-slayers, and celebrates in a vehement ode the reactionary peace “wrought” by the ice-bound Toryism of Wellington. They all, in their hearts, cling passionately to individualism—to the chance given to the man of talent, the fox in the well, to utilise the stupid horns of the average goat as the means of egress into the sunlight. They have no faith in the kindly social impulse, in the evolution of imbeciles, in the higher combinations of the race; and perhaps they are right: time alone will show. All I say is that we are trying for something different, not altogether because we believe in our own theory of life as good and eventually practicable, but because we see that the other theory has been tried in the history of the world again and again, often with magnificent results, but always with the appalling sacrifice of eighty per cent. of the community to the claims of an ignorant and miserable servitude; always with final failure to achieve anything like permanency and success.’

Randal grinned drily, while the other went on :

'Your *chasse au bonheur* in an individual, based as it is on cruelty and egotism, ends inevitably in disgust and isolation, in disillusionment, hatred, and despair. As it is with an individual, so is it with a community, a nation, a race, a civilisation. The hero of *Le Rouge et le Noir* finishes on the guillotine, and, though his tragic fate is, half of it, an indictment of his time, yet the other half is certainly an indictment of himself. But how infinitely preferable is this to the last state of the hero of the *Chartreuse de Parme*, with his cynical acceptance of the baseness and bestiality that form the foundation of civic slavery !'

They had crossed the open space and taken their places almost unconsciously in a little glade that had an outlook towards the west, Randal lying at half-length, the other seated.

Now there was a pause.

'You know,' said Randal, 'I cannot argue. Your eloquence pleases and convinces me, as eloquence always does. My own never failed of that effect, till I was well past thirty. Then the vanity of conviction struck me like all the other vanities, and I gave up talking to try to prove or disprove anything. Therefore I will answer you in your own *non*-eloquent style, which I feel to be so much more disconcerting, and remark that in these matters it is mostly an affair of

temperament. It pleases serene natures, with a streak of enthusiasm in them, such as yours, to set out on the hunt in company with a crowd. You look on their stupidities with a kindly eye; you insist on treating them as being better than they are, *et cetera*, *et cetera*, *et cetera*: I need not fill in the picture. You love, in a word, to juggle away the aching sense of the soul's solitude by a perpetual give and take with others. My nature is different. I am *atrabilious*, I suppose, and find a sort of savage pleasure (I thank you for the word) in the full admittance of the fact of our fatal isolation. Do what we may, we remain individuals. The soul is never more lonely than when it seems most lost in others. And I am an individualist by instinct as well as by persuasion. The element, therefore, of cruelty enters into all I do. Oh, I know it! It did not need the gentle look of your eyes, my friend, to tell me that I was "cruel" to that poor little chit of a girl just now—cruel because utterly careless of how what I said affected her—to whom I only spoke for a few moments. The blind and unscrupulous assertion, then, of my own individuality has been my one guiding impulse, and never more so than when masquerading in the angel garb of self-effacement? I admit it to the full. In reality I have always hated life. I hate it now more than ever, because now I know that my hatred is justified by

the facts. I have lost the faculty of dreaming. I can cheat myself no more ; that is all. We have trained ourselves, at least we are told so, to look upon even moderate drunkenness as a vice, but at heart we have a humorous toleration for the peccant convivialist, and it is only for the secret drinker that every one reserves his genuinely righteous wrath. Well, I am a secret drinker, or, at most, I have one companion of my sombre orgy. When I drink in company, I despise them all, and they instinctively feel repulsion to me. I never remember when it was not so. My impulses of love and admiration therefore have gone out to those who I felt were of my species. The brigand, the ruffian, alone appeals to me personally. I prefer Benvenuto Cellini to Francis of Assisi, and Dick Turpin to John Howard the philanthropist. If I had been a modern French writer, I would sooner have written *Le Rouge et le Noir* than all the novels of Balzac and Zola, so completely do I feel my youth expressed in Julien Sorel. Possibly I should like to be different. But it is the sheerest folly to speculate. Life justifies the individualist—the poor devil you have been jumping upon as “the man of talent”—quite as much as the socialist. I venture to believe that a large proportion of humanity is made up of secret drinkers, in some shape or other, and that proportion would reach to the half, I dare say, of the

more intelligent. Individualistic civilisations, you confess, have had magnificent results, but have always failed, you declare, to achieve anything like permanency or success. Have socialistic civilisations achieved even the magnificent results, to say nothing of the permanency or success? Napoleon's France went to pieces in a superbly insane effort to assert itself in actual dominancy over all Europe, but at least it lived fully and intensely. Would the slow-rotting dissolution of a community bred upon *panem et circenses* have been better ?'

'There have been no socialistic civilisations,' said Wilson.

'Oh, listen to him !' cried Randal. 'Listen to the ingenuous young man ! He imagines that modern industrial socialism is unique, and hasn't occurred a hundred times in history already ! He imagines that when it has satisfied the physical needs of all, it will continue to lead a strenuous intellectual life, in order to make us all into young gods and goddesses, and not into devotees of skittles and beer and tea and scandal ! No, in the new civilisation of socialism, my friends, human nature will be completely changed. For we are at last about to realise the kingdom of heaven on earth, my friends, and attune the souls of the masses to the pitch of cherubim and seraphim, while all the individualising infants shall be treated

in foundling asylums as pitiful samples of a vicious atavism.'

Wilson made no reply, looking in front of him.

'Now,' said Randal, 'I am once more waiting to be confuted.'

'I can't confute you. Perhaps you are right. Who knows? No one can see more than a few steps ahead. We all have the hopeless sadness of our limitations, and it is easy to destroy the little nest of trust which, like to frail and migrant birds, we construct with dreams of downy fledglings, eager for the skies.'

There was a long silence.

Then Randal said gently:

'You make me remind myself of the brutal, heedless schoolboy who has just wrecked such a nest, from the sheer wanton sense of his brutal heedlessness. Forgive me!' And he extended his left hand.

Wilson took it with his right and pressed it.

'It is nothing,' he said, 'for, again, perhaps you are wrong. Who knows?'

The silence fell upon them once more.

It was Randal who broke it, saying:

'How we dawdle and delay in our projects on Italy! I almost feel as if we should not summon enough resolution to get there after all.'

'Once or twice,' murmured Wilson, still looking in

front of him, 'I have wondered a little at my apathy. Truly Italy seems little enough to me now, and once it seemed so much! I used to feel that I should never be able to express myself with adequacy in my painting until I had lived in Florence or Rome.'

'This phase is passing,' said Randal. 'In Goethe's time, and Byron's, and Shelley's, Italy meant a species of mental liberation, and it still seems to mean so to the Scandinavian races. Ibsen's young men and women feel this. Italy stands to them as the incarnation of the *joie de vivre*. But we others—French, English, and Germans, and even the Americans—begin to realise that modernity holds something greater and more actual than either the Mediæval or Renaissance Art of "the land that consoled Europe for the loss of Greece." Italy as an ideal is completely played out, and nobody realises it more acutely than the Italians. It was a fine instinct which kept your Rossetti at home, even if the same instinct took other shapes not sanctioned by the approval of our young and socialistic poet-painters. There he could live in the Italy of his imagination. Though, I dare say,' he added, returning on his thought, 'sloth and chloral greatly assisted.'

'Perhaps you are right,' mused Wilson. 'Perhaps

the phase is passing. It is certain that at this moment I could turn my back on Italy without regret. Six years ago I should have held such a temper impossible. Spain attracts me more.'

'My dear fellow,' said Randal, 'at thirty, let me repeat, the taste for lollipops deserts us, and we find them no longer endurable, except, perhaps, in the shape of acid drops. Italian music wearies me to death. The lovely nullity of the Italian women's faces is only the same thing in another shape. It makes you feel brutal. Spain is still pungent. Its popular music makes you vibrate and shiver, or fills your eyes with inexplicable tears. I found after a little that I even grew to like their country *cuisine*—their rotten cheese and blood-curdling wine, their greasy oils and onions. I am devoted to onions: you know it. And that devotion dates from my first winter in Southern Spain. Let us change our minds: leave Florence and Venice, Rome and Naples, to their own worn-out devices, and creep along by the coast railway round the feet of the Pyrenees into Gerona. We can get from there right down as far as Alicant—that's half-way to Gibraltar, and from there we could go to Madrid and return by the north; or, if you like, we could hold on a hundred miles or so past Alicant to Lorca, the terminus, and then make our way along the coast again, under the



Sierra Nevada, to Malaga, and from there by rail to Sevilla, Cordova, and the whole business.'

'A regular campaign in the hunt for happiness,' said Wilson, smiling.

'Well, yes ; and what better weapons are there to go out with than movement and variety?'

'*Solvitur ambulando?* We shall not bring down our game there any more than here. But we may, perhaps, get nearer to it, and even have a few long shots. I agree.'

'The truth is,' said Randal, 'that Italy is a mistake for both of us. I went there once with a woman I loved, who is dead. You planned to go there once with a woman you loved, who is also dead. Yours was the better fate, because the illusion of your problematical happiness still remains with you. For me it exists no longer. Alas!' he sighed, 'women are bad travelling companions. At every step they betray the appalling conventionality of their outlook. They see nothing, because they know nothing, observe nothing, recognise nothing. Their only originality lies in the forms of their passion. All the rest is mere decorative accessory—the *mise en scène* for love-making or for the social farce. And the worst is, that if you cannot persuade them to hold their tongues, you also will see nothing of what passes before you. Italy has very little to say to you

and me just at present, and it has this melancholy association for both of us. To each it would recall the happiest and most protracted dream of his life; and in your case there would be the added regret . . .’ He paused. ‘Why are you smiling?’ he asked.

‘I was thinking the poor little chit of a girl had had her revenge on us after all.’

‘How?’

‘By prescribing for us the tendency of our thoughts.’

Randal shrugged his shoulders.

‘Perhaps,’ he said. ‘Yes, that is about all they can do for us—profitably, at least.’

‘Perhaps,’ murmured the other. ‘The breeze seems to be falling as quickly as it rose,’ he added. ‘How still the country is! The heat has passed away. What an impression of tranquillity, of repose, of peace!’

‘Only an impression, alas!’

‘Only an impression, true; but surely it means something.’

‘Does it? That is just the question. The ruthless struggle of nature does not stop one moment under that deceptive veil of truce. These trees and plants, these flowers and grasses, are more intent on their own survival and the slaughter of their fellows in

such an expansive hour as this, than when wind and rain are lashing them. What prayer spares the prey because of the divine beauty of the quiet and the hush ?'

'Yes, it is illusion, I know ; everything is illusion. There is only one certainty.'

It was Randal's turn to smile.

'Then you don't believe,' he said,

'that death must be  
Like all the rest, a mockery'?

Wilson shook his head.

'Not in the least,' he said. 'If it is not the extinction of the ego, then it is nothing, and that is the one—the great desideratum.'

'Of the conscious ego, you mean ?'

'Yes, of the conscious ego.'

'But isn't it almost as hateful to think that, by the law of the conservation of energy, our entities—I mean the whole sum-total of us, body and soul—are perpetually jumbled up, created, dispersed, re-created, and re-dispersed for ever? Death as annihilation is just as much an illusion as anything else.'

'Not so far as the conscious ego is concerned, and not even altogether so far as the unconscious ego. I never could understand the application which you make of the law of the conservation of energy. We are far from being able to assert that matter is eternal.

We know nothing about it. All we know is that there is a perpetual and prodigious expenditure of energy going on, the vast bulk of which is, so far as we can see, absolute waste. Of the heat which the earth actually receives from the sun, of the earth's own heat, enormous quantities are radiating into space every moment, and are, at least so far as we are concerned, to all appearances, completely lost. The time is conceivable, if it is not actually realisable, in which the earth will be like the moon—in which the sun will be like the moon. What will have come to the energy which they have given off? Who can say? This idea of the everlasting *potpourri* of animate and inanimate life on the earth is an exaggerated, if it is not quite a false one. Not only does the conscious ego become extinguished, but the unconscious elements of us suffer very little or nothing of the unending transmigrations (to use the old word) which seem to some minds so horrible. I retain unimpaired my belief in Death. It is the one certainty—the one need—the one consolation. This is the love of Nature, that the same peace awaits us all.'

'Ah!' said Randal. 'Now I have the philosophic and metaphysical basis of an aborted poem of yours which I picked up in your studio a few months ago. It was in a little black, glazy notebook on the table

by the screen. You had only written a few lines, and then given it up ; but one of those lines had the power to haunt me. It was this : "*O beautiful and beneficent Death !*"'

Wilson sat in silence, looking out across the scene at their feet.

A train, running westward towards the dark-blue, vaporous hills and the setting sun, glided slowly away, throwing up a large white plume of smoke, from the greenery that surrounded the village out into the flat, sun-deep, and open plain. It skirted the rippling curve of the bay, so small an object in that vast natural arena, but so restless, so active, vanquishing time and distance. Presently it would pass into the dark tunnel of the hills, and for the moment the lovely and illusive repose of heaven and earth and sea would lie on all things. The bright yellow blossoms of the broom scarcely shivered. The scent of the pines seemed fainter than when it mounted in the gusts of heat radiated from the earth ; but it was omnipresent. Not a bird's note from the tree-tops. The quiet was complete. No ; one could just hear, far down below, rising and falling, the intermittent sound of a voice singing snatches of a Franco-Italian street-song—the driver, perhaps, humming tunes to himself in the fresh pleasure of the growing cool.

There was a long silence, and then Randal slowly rose, saying :

‘Well, my friend, if it is in that temper that we set out for our last hunt for happiness, I think that we may be said to carry the game with us. Ah, truly,’ he went on, as they turned back and looked once more out eastward across the red-roofed town, the bright islands, the promontories, the foam-fringed bays, and the blue expanse of the Mediterranean—‘ah, truly, that is exactly what we get (I had almost said *all* we get, erring profanely), that guerdon of eternal peace, and you are right to invest it with warm and human attributes. It shows, I say, that you are still on the right side of thirty ; but I, who am only just on the right side of forty, and who (may I say it?) *militavi non sine gloria* as a praiser of Pantheism and the final repose of the ego, have quite failed to find poetic expression for my later views. You know how utterly dry my spring has run. I have not written a personal poem this decade. I am smitten with impotence. I feel as acutely, or almost as acutely, as ever I did ; but why repeat myself? I have lost all interest in my own sensations, and almost all interest in other people’s. Only my knowledge of life has kept me from some desperate and insane enthusiasm—such as Socialism or Toryism. Often I am in danger of that sombre rage, that *sæva*

*indignatio*, against human stupidity and injustice which slowly maddened men of talent so diverse as Swift and Flaubert, as Ruskin and Maupassant. I ought to form a fit disciple for your creed of the beauty and beneficence of Death. But I do not. I remain at heart cold and indifferent. I agree with you entirely as to the facts. I, too, feel the certainty, the need, the consolation; but death still remains to me a puzzling and disagreeable process, like the unknown manipulations of an unreliable dentist. I hate pain, and I have no confidence in the dexterity of the tooth-extractor. In a word, I am a coward; and though I have survived all those whom I loved (love in any intensive sense is more impossible to me now than ever it was, so to say)—indeed, though I have survived myself, I still live on, and have no desire to die. I have had that desire; but it passed, as most things pass, without becoming chronic. But why do I trouble you with my vain and egoist visions? Once more, forgive an old and worn-out huntsman of the foolish hunt for happiness. I will admit that I wish at times I had been accidentally shot—by some one else or by myself. It would have been better for me. Ah, the women I have loved! the men I have loved! Ah, beautiful and beneficent Death!’

Looking at his face for a moment, Wilson saw that the eyes were full of tears.

